

Mr Carey

By DOROTHEA CONYERS

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The Strayings of Sandy

BY
D. CONYERS

Author of

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Pedigree," "The Thorn Bit,"
"Cloth *versus* Silk,"
etc.



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THE STRAYINGS OF SANDY

CHAPTER I

HOW THE HEALTH OF MR. ACLAND REQUIRED CONSIDERATION

"He eats—he has indigestion ;
He toils, and he may not stop."

—KIPLING.

ALEXANDER ACLAND dabbed a tiny cut on his chin with a piece of cotton-wool, looked at his reflection in the glass, and sighed deeply. The reflecting surface was unshaded and uncompromising ; it returned an image clearly outlined by the searching rays of a June sun. It was a man's room ; no soft muslin curtains, tinted blinds, and swathed frame to soften the lines on the face which the mirror duplicated.

Acland stared and sighed again, a sharp breath of unrest and discontent. He looked ill ; his glass said so, refusing denial. His cheeks were flabby and leaden ; his blue eyes deeply sunken ; his chins were doubling ; there was too much fat on his short, round figure ; the lines below his waist were convex.

Acland was a neat man. He sighed again as he manipulated the buttons of his waistcoat and noted the strained wrinkles edging away from the button-holes. He was weighed down by a sense of depression and lassitude; by a hatred of the bright sun, the cloudless sky; by an inexplicable feeling which created a weary animal desire to creep into some corner, close his eyes, and rest for ever.

His daily round of business, his breakfast and lunch and dinner, loomed before him as so many demons, poking red-hot forks of unbearable routine into his brain.

"Phillips," he called crossly.

"Sir." Phillips, after the manner of his kind, appeared instantly and noiselessly. "Sir," said Phillips, standing attentively.

"Phillips," said Acland querulously, "look at this suit." Business man though he was, he permitted himself the luxury of flannels before luncheon. "I really believe, Phillips, that Hart's eight-guinea suits were better value. This"—he pulled at the wrinkled waistcoat—"this is losing shape—disgracefully."

"Certainly, sir!" said Phillips, gently bored. "Breakfast just ready, sir."

Acland took out a pencil, jotting down calculations.

"At the difference of a guinea how much extra wear would repay. If a suit at eight-guineas wears—"

Phillips could not say. A time-honoured catch concerning a herring and a half for three half-pence would obtrude itself, but was not advanceable. But he certainly declared in favour of the eight-guinea suits, as most suitable for a gentleman (they came on to him).

"Phillips." Acland dropped the pencil. One guinea — minus wear — would not work out. "Phillips, do I . . . look . . . very ill?"

Phillips ceased to be a valet and became human.

"Well, you do, sir," he said gently, watching his master.

"I feel . . . hanged . . . ill," said Acland unhappily, putting a pearl pin into his tie and going into his dining-room.

Late June blazed in London; heavy sunshine pouring down on wooden pavements and close streets; on dull, green trees. The window was open — hot reek of baked wood, melting asphalte, and the roar of Piccadilly drifted in across the boxes of glaring geraniums and white marguerites.

Acland sniffed it with distaste, as he sat down to breakfast — kidneys perched, plumply red, on toast; cold ham, a mushroom omelette; white poached eggs nestling in a nest of crisp bacon; dark, clear coffee; a jug of cream; half-a-dozen sauces. The man ate languidly, from custom rather than desire, smearing ham and kidneys with pepper and mustard, soaking them in pungent sauce; to get up after a second cup of strong coffee unrefreshed and wretched. Then, sighing again, he left his shady room and passed down his quiet street into Piccadilly.

The glare and noise made him sick and dizzy. He stood peevishly impatient, waiting for his 'bus, the driver of which, knowing him, pulled close to the pavement. As a rule, Acland enjoyed his drive; but to-day he sat with strained nerves, hating two girls who called the day glorious; he even forgot to get off, and had to pay an extra penny, which savoured of madness. Then he crawled back to his office,

endeavouring to care whether stocks rose or fell, but it was all flat, hopeless, with a distaste of life and a head like lighted lead ; so, having boxed the office boy's ears, and called Mr. Jones, his head clerk, several kinds of idiots, he went down and got into a hansom, too weary to risk a 'bus.

"309 Harley Street," he snapped out.

Now if Acland had gone as a stranger to the specialist he drove to, Dr. Grattan would have looked grave, prescribed Homburg, and Acland would probably have died within a year or two; ending his life's story instead of commencing it. As it was, they had been at college together, and Grattan had been best man at Acland's strange wedding. So the sick man drove now to him, sighing still, but more softly, as he was not thinking of himself.

Dr. Grattan was in, and would see him. Acland shivered as he walked into the sombre room; doctors never take us cheerily; then he assured himself that he was merely bilious, and told his friend so querulously.

"A little quinine—bromide—I want some simple stuff."

Grattan listened quietly, he removed the flannel coat; tapped and poked and listened; smote Acland's fat chest with palpable disdain, and came again to his left side, listening through strange black instruments.

"Bromides—quinine— I'm sorry, Alex," he said; "but you're in a thundering bad way."

Acland sat down suddenly, one arm in his coat.

"You've just come in time. Routine; money-making; pence-saving; under-exercise and over-eating. I know you. That's done it. Breakfast—good coffee, ham, eggs, kidneys, mustard, sauces."

Acland thought this savoured of magic. "Whisky and soda, or port, at twelve; lunch at the old place; steak, chop, pint of bitter; sweet; *the* stilton; cup of coffee, glass of port; walk back to office, worry over money. Go home, change, tea at club, walk in Park, or Bridge—you're a shocking player—Good dinner, more Bridge; supper. A man in hard work might do all that, but your daily toddle won't suffice. Your brain's strained; your tummy's strained; your heart's giving it up, but—there's a hope for you."

"Homburg?" said Acland, now very white.

"Not at all; it would merely bore you. Rest . . . common-sense . . . an interest in life . . . live in the open air . . . take up a hobby. . . . Race—shoot—hunt—yacht . . . you get sea-sick—couldn't do better. Leave business for a year. You've heaps of money. Alex, take my advice—or—" His face grew gentle again.

Acland remarked slowly that he couldn't see his way to affording it.

Grattan almost brutally returned that in that case Acland's living would cost nothing. "I give you eighteen months," he said, "and I never heard of a chap who could take his money with him. One's dead a long time, Alex, and destination is uncertain."

Acland frowned. He never missed church; even taking a cab on wet days. He said so; he grumbled; but remained to lunch, and took notes of the physician's directions. Money was sweet, but life sweeter; he knew he could afford the holiday.

The sun blazed as he drove away; afraid now of the odd flutter in his left side, which he had put down to indigestion; afraid of the sudden baring

of Death's teeth. . . . The advice was sound, but what was he to do? Shoot?—they would have to drive fat geese for him. Hunt? race? What hobby could he take up and fling his heart into? He went into his club. The *Daily Mail* fell open at the Racing News; eager men behind him were studying the tape, watching for a result. It came; he heard a jubilant outcry as they went off.

Racing? Here was a hobby where expenses might be saved and great interest aroused. If a horse won, apparently the owner received a certain sum of money; if it did not, you tried again. There would be unlimited fresh air; and, given a satisfactory race-horse, no expenditure.

Acland laid the paper upon his knee, and Dame Chance set down beside him Captain Partridge, a prominent racing man and a slight acquaintance.

"Partridge," Acland hemmed diffidently. "Partridge, would you tell me how one buys a race-horse?"

"With a cheque," observed Partridge, "with unkindly brevity.

"But this is important." Acland ignored the snub, and tapped the *Daily Mail*. "I want one, you see, as a rest-cure."

"What?" said Captain Partridge. "What!!"

"Yes; as a rest-cure. I am told that I am very ill. If you could help me. . . . Forgive me . . ."

He plunged into hurried explanations of his case, giving a full account of his breakdown, his ailments, and his prospective cure. Surely a race-horse, a satisfactory race-horse of one's own, would provide interest, amusement, and possible profit. Partridge listened: he was kindly at heart, and he looked at the city man's sunken eyes and leaden cheeks

with quick observance; hiding his smiles at this new method of taking up the turf.

"And having bought the horse," he inquired mildly; "did Acland propose keeping it in his flat, or in a tool-shed as Jaberjee's Derby mare, with exercise in the Park as training?"

He was sorry for his sarcasm when he saw the little man's disturbed face: these were details which he was unable to cope with.

Partridge drummed his fingers on his knees. If Acland really wanted to race, he might help him. There was, he explained, the alternative of leasing a horse, instead of buying it outright, and he could do that for him. It came to the same thing without the trouble. He could give him Crimson Rambler, a useful handicap horse, with a tube in. "He's won twice this year," said the gentleman trainer. "I keep him, you see, and I can let you my cottage close to the stables, so that you can take all the interest you choose in him. See the other horses; race as much as you like."

The vision defined itself rosily . . . it was clearly fate: the path to racing was smoothed to him; he could be cured forthwith in this country cottage, where he pictured rose-hung walls and a shady garden. . . . Acland's eyes grew bright, but habitual caution advised questions.

"It sounds very nice, and you are exceedingly kind, Partridge," he said. "But," he opened a note-book, "as a business man I should like to know the approximate cost . . . why he, the animal, is called the Crimson Rambler . . . and when he wears a tube?"

A spasm flickered over Captain Partridge's face as he replied that the horse was by Fiery Dawn out

of Runaway, and that he made a noise . . . he would win a few races."

Acland patted his double chin ; this was far better than the pursuit of yapping dogs and fleeing fox. The keen air on the Downs, the watching of the horses, the interest and quiet ; it was all he wanted. The shadow of death jogged his elbow, disturbing lifelong economy. Almost before he was aware of it—having been assured the horse would win a race—he had signed a short paper, setting forth that the horse, Crimson Rambler, five years, by Fiery Dawn . . . Runaway . . . was leased to him for the term of one year, he to receive three-fourth of stakes and pay all expenses. Having signed this and a cheque, he arranged to go to Croxton on the following Friday and see his new steed ; the cottage would be ready for him.

"I am really much obliged to you for smoothing my path," said Acland precisely, as he said good-bye.

His light luncheon and plain tea had made him feel better. He turned cheerfully in at Stanhope gate, to walk up and down, already contemplating the delights of winning races ; also the air of the Downs, the rose-embowered cottage, the garden, the country fruit and cream. . . .

What Eric Pritchard, who had listened open-mouthed, said to his partner Partridge was this.

"Has the old skin got a good race in him, Birdie ? Whisky and soda, James, I want one, listening to that little man. Will the Rambler bring him home . . . eh ? . . ."

"Later on he undoubtedly will," said Partridge placidly. "For the present, rest and quiet will suit Mr. Acland's health . . ."

Then he too had a drink, and allowed his repressed merriment place.

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Acland, carefully placing prospective winnings against the expenses of the trip, finished his Park toddle, told all his friends of his sad state of health, and went back to his rooms, where he found several letters awaiting him. One, carrying two halfpenny stamps, put on upside-down, bore the postmark of Ballymacshane. He took it up first, and opened it slowly, with thoughtful eyes. Twice every year, at Christmas and in June, his late wife's second cousin wrote to him, and he answered. Long letters from Ireland; short responses from England, but recalling the days of his one brief romance. He sat down now, looking at the blotted sheets, seeing it all again.

It was June then too; he was a busy little man, starting life; his type-writing girl falling ill, he had sent for another, and dictated letters to her, scarcely looking at her. Then as he finished and took the letters to look over, this new girl had handed him a bundle of errors which made him gasp with astonishment. Misplaced letters; lack of stops; every error the novice knows.

"I hope they are right," she said.

Sharp remonstrance; surprise at such grave incompetence; a tirade, checked by an audible sniff from the typist . . . a slender maiden with chestnut hair, deep-coloured eyes, and a mouth which would laugh. It laughed now, mocking, brimming eyes; while she talked almost defiantly. "He had dictated so fast, she wanted time . . ." She suddenly dropped her haughty head and sobbed aloud. Sympathy

was imperative: he was not a brute, tears were mopped up with a white silk handkerchief, and the whole story was poured out, losing a business morning. She was Irish, a Miss Blundell: had run away from difficulties at home to cut her way to fortune through this great, cruel London. Had taken up this work, and, after weeks of weary waiting, this chance to come to his office had been given her. Now she knew she had failed. She was not fit for work for months. Kathleen Blundell rose bravely; but love pranced on the hard, white keys and the little romance began. The letters were recopied—she came again; working laboriously. The little man, young then, found out how she had run away from an importunate suitor; flying so that her mother's entreaties should not break her resolution down. How she had struggled and hoped, and never dreamt of going back, or acknowledging failure. Acland lost his heart—he asked her to marry him and she accepted him, liking him. But—here the tragedy crept in: he did not dream of real poverty. He waited for holiday-time for his wedding. Hot July dragged on; he, blind fool! never asked her how she lived, saw her soft skin grow more transparent, her grey eyes bigger, and never thought of the Irish pride which would not let her tell him or her people that she starved. She always met him with a smile, was always gay and brave, but suddenly, after a long walk homewards, a tea-less afternoon, because Acland had an appointment, she failed. Three days later she was dead. She bade him a smiling good-bye and went dinnerless to bed, never to get up again. He could recall Grattan's words as the young doctor bent over her:

"Starved to death," he said. "Were you blind,

Alex, not to see it? No breakfast, no dinner; dry bread for lunch."

But Kathleen laughed from her pillows; imperious to the last, defying death. She would have her way—carry out her triumph; write home to say she was married and happy. Romance played a strange game with this little man. His wedding was at a death-bed; bitter remorse his real bride. Her last thoughts were for Ireland; she whispered of it, shaking her head at the nourishment she could not take. Of her people, of Ballymacshane Castle . . . Alex must write to Standish Blundell for her photograph, taken on old Chieftan.

The wires were sent off, announcing her happiness; she talked of the future, declaring she must get well, and was dead before nightfall; starved where a word would have saved her.

Acland buried his romance: living to turn himself into a niggardly business machine; but he wrote for the photograph to Blundell, and the strange friendship commenced.

Blundell replied in four blotted pages, lamenting Kathleen, reviling one Sir Edmund Graves, who pursued her till she fled. "She would take her own way and make her own way, she said, and was off by the mail, third class, too, God help us! And never a word home till three days ago to say she was married and happy—the black retriever bit the telegraph boy in the leg—I was at her place—and now that she's dead—I've a chestnut filly called Kathleen, and Tom's daughter is after calling one of the new setter pups Katty, and 'tis little we can do now." The letter finished by asking Acland over, and was laid carefully away—docketed and numbered.

Christmas brought a turkey and five dozen eggs,—

principally broken,—and so the correspondence went on.

Opening this summer letter, Acland wondered why he had not thought of Ireland, and of buying a race-horse over there. Standish as usual filled four untidy pages. He said the hay was saving and the calves were up in price. He pressed the usual invitation, setting forth that there was always a room and a welcome. Why not come in winter; he had a whistling mare that couldn't fall. Did Alexander know of any fellow who wanted a pair to drive in the Park, browns, sixteen hands, like as two peas, except that one was a trifle higher than the other, and a bit darker colour too, but you couldn't have everything. And if you didn't chance to meet a motor you couldn't stir them in the shafts.

Acland read without comprehension—he never tried to pass on these equine paragons—but he wrote now telling of all his ills, saying he was sorry he had not tried Ireland, but setting forth the economy to a poor man of leasing a Crimson Rambler which would clear the expenses of the cure, especially as the animal's rent had not been exorbitant.

He then weighed the letter with care, and called Phillips, another person to be told. Phillips listened with well-trained interest. Salestown Downs did not appeal to him, but he preserved a semblance of cheeriness and inquired as to domestic arrangements: especially about a cook. This came with a jar of actuality. Somehow Acland, accustomed to London, had pictured the cottage complete—but Phillips knew of a lady who could come at once.

“I have rented an excellent animal, Phillips, one which has already secured several races this year. Extremely exciting and interesting, the pursuit of

racing, Phillips, and remunerative. I perceive in this paper horses entered for a race, value £1,000. Take this, Phillips," and he handed the letter.

"Certainly, sir. I have heard of race-horses as . . . interesting, sir," said Phillips woodenly.

He stood at the door in the gentle coolness, looking down at seething Piccadilly.

"The Croxton Stable," he said, "what waits months for a 'coop.' The old Rambler . . . top weight in his races—leased to the master. Crums!"

Here he dropped the letter in the box and did not know it was heavy with fate.

CHAPTER II

HOW THE REST-CURE PROGRESSED

"Rest, traveller, rest . . .
Far from the haunts of men."
—WORDSWORTH.

ACLAND was swept along on a wave of sudden happenings. He had a long interview with his head clerk, and only remembered as he walked by way of Leicester Square to his club that Mr. Jones, instead of appearing agitated by his prospective loss, had assured Acland that it would make no difference to him—a mere increase of answering letters.

The little man spun suddenly as this smote home: he all but raised his umbrella to hail a hansom and fly back to speak to Jones; but vacillating, jabbed an unoffending old lady on the nose, and overwhelmed by her remonstrances, walked on, deciding it was merely his head clerk's stupidity.

Captain Partridge was a man of action; he said the cottage was empty, the fresh air and the Crimson Rambler ready, and he would meet Acland at early exercise on Friday morning—so that he could see the horse and commence the cure immediately.

He glanced away from direct questionings concerning the exact amount which Crimson Rambler would produce; and could not be pinned down to naming the races the handicap horse was to win.

Instead, he would branch off into abstruse discussions, which so puzzled Acland, that he forgot his determination to know what sums of money he was certain of, because he wished to write it down. He scarcely seemed to have interviewed Grattan and learned that he was really ill, before he found himself landlord of a race-horse and a cottage; and arrived at Waterloo with a great deal of luggage, Phillips, a new cook, and a bewildered mind.

June suns can sulk: yesterday a chill wind had raised dust-swirls in the suburbs; to-day it carried a thin rain, churning up black mud on the pavements; blurring the glass as the train moved off to slip past that grim sign of "Necrop Start," which reminds the thoughtful traveller that one day he will commence a journey which has no ending.

A ticket taken to an unknown destination, with wave of farewell and sound of weeping on the dark platform; but the train which would bear him then knew no way back.

As Acland saw the sign through rain-dimmed panes he shivered, suddenly remembering that this was no mere pleasure-trip, but a fight to the finish with the Lord of all cemeteries. If the rest-cure should fail? If his heart continued to flutter; his head to ache: he might soon come that way again, a still, silent passenger, to lie by Kathleen's side in the garden-like churchyard.

"Cht!" he said, opening a paper. "They ought to keep that hang sign out of sight." Having made the remark to an empty carriage, and received no response, he skimmed the paper, observing with a consciousness of good omen that the Croxton Stable had won two races, and then became absorbed by a yellow-covered racing novel. in which the hero

always owned some magnificent race-horse, which was unfairly drugged or pulled so as to prolong the interest, and stir up rancour against the villain (who was always a gentleman). And then eventually, the hero would with this animal win the Ledger and the Duke of York Stakes and a few small prizes. So that the villain, who was always also a book-maker, was ruined, and that the trainer's lovely daughter could wear pink and blue halved in her hat, and rush into the paddock to kiss the apprentice who rode, and who had refused the bribe offered by the villain to pull the horse opposite the stand, with a dread promise of ruining him if he failed to do so.

It was very often Greek to Acland; there were niceties of weights and distances which he dwelt on lightly; but the great stakes delighted him; he turned to the end where the hero retires with the modest winnings of £150,000, and smiled. Crimson Rambler, in a lesser way, would do the same for him, and supposing he risked five or ten pounds at ten to one, the percentage would be enormous.

Acland felt better, hope and change work wonders; the diet of weak tea and toast had already done him good. The train ran past Fleet, and out into the clear country. He put down the window, and receiving a gust of rain in his face shut it speedily. Fresh air must wait.

"Croxtton, sir," said Phillips, opening the carriage door. "Station-master says the cottage is three miles off, sir, but if it's not away we can get a waggonette at the inn here."

Phillips had only just alighted, yet he knew everything. Acland got out, chilled and tired; the wind was colder here, the rain heavier, he occupied a little hooded shelter in company with the cook, a stern-

faced lady with a great deal of small luggage, and occupied it ill-humouredly, while Phillips went to reconnoitre. A station without attendant flies had been unforeseen.

Phillips found the waggonette, and returned triumphant to undertake the task of packing his master, the cook, and the luggage into it. By the time he had finished, even the portmanteau looked snappish; but Phillips mounted placidly to the box and bade the man proceed. The driver did so; down a chalky precipice with a grinding jar of breaks which rasped Acland's overwrought nerves, and induced the cook to observe "Lawks!" loudly. They passed into a lane, rose-starred hedges bordering it; they climbed a hill, Acland and the cook striving painfully with many sliding things, and still mounted, until they turned on to the bleakness of the narrow road; a mere ribbon crossing the great grass bosom of the Downs. Here the wind rose with nasty triumph, whipping on the rain; and the only person who could possibly have enjoyed his first glimpse of this new country was Phillips, snugly ensconced behind an umbrella, with Acland's dressing-case at his feet.

The road dipped and rose like the sea; the cook declared aloud that "them dratted portmanagers had not left a sound bone in her body," and Acland merely refrained further swearing because he was afraid of his new domestic's feelings. Then they grated down a last long precipice; bucked a hog-backed bridge and found themselves in a nest of quaint, tiled houses, a square church tower high among them. Creepers clung to old walls; the tiled roofs were crimson and gold and grey even in that light; a small stream bubbled by the roadside.

Acland looked eagerly for his home; he saw a little

house speaking of comfort, and hoped, but they passed it. They left the village and then stopped, being told to get down and turn up a rough track, and so, on the brow of a rise, they came to the cottage. It was built of grey stone, hard and cold as forced charity, splashes of red marking its doors and windows. It had no garden at front or back. The red door opened plump on to the uncompromising world; the back on to a maze of rabbit holes. It was scarcely decent, this little house, in its unveiled nakedness; having the air of perpetually taking a bath without towel of hedge or paling to wrap in as it dried.

Acland went up the track to the open door; he possessed an artistic soul, and the iron trap of depression fell heavily on it. The grey, rough stone, the door open to the rough fields, the falling rain and rising wind; death compassed comfortably seemed a more desirable companion.

Phillips, after a slight argument, conducted the bruised cook to the back door—he never made social mistakes—where having stumbled into a rabbit hole, her voice could be heard raised bitterly: "Sitting up like a dook no less while she—" but somehow the voice trailed and died, and the first person to receive a cup of hot tea was certainly Mr. Phillips. He only waited to drink it before bringing some to Acland. The sitting-room was a square well, the window shut, the table-cloth a flowered atrocity, the chairs hard. Acland tried three and raised a weary, drawn face.

"Phillips," he said, "send a wire—no, a letter, to order my large easy-chair. At once, Phillips."

Phillips was human; he found the post had left, so wired, and charged the eightpence to brown boot-polish.

Acland perched unhappily. His head ached; he

was dead tired ; raw cold drifted in through the now opened window ; the lamp smelt ; his breath hung like a fog. He got into his overcoat, longing for the hum of the streets, the jingle of the bells, the stamp of sliding hoofs, the rumble of great 'buses, the purr of motors.

The rest-cure began badly. Phillips having had his tea and some fresh eggs, came in and made things better. He lent his master his own deck-chair, and a small fire soon dispelled the brooding damp.

Dinner was not a success. One may be ordered to live simply and yet desire good food. The soup tasted of preserved tin ; the chops had been alive yesterday ; and, judging by their native resistance to knife and teeth, were evidently sulking at their conversion from sheep to mutton. In fact, Acland dined lightly off some strawberries, and being weaker than he guessed, crouched over the fire and refused to feel comforted.

The cook made a mince for Phillips, declaring the " mutting " was like iron.

Acland went to bed, but not to sleep ; the quiet kept him awake. As he tossed and tumbled he found himself straining his ears for some sound to break the silence. Once a cart rumbled on the road—a horse's footsteps echoed, and through it all, maddeningly sweet, came the clink, clonk of the sheep-bells. They would die to a distant tinkle, and rise again, clink, clonk, distracting the nervous little man. Then he fell into an uneasy sleep, and seemed barely to have closed his eyes when Phillips stood beside him.

" Five o'clock, sir," said Phillips. " Just half a mile to walk, sir. Captain Partridge arrived by a

late train last night, and I've made you a cup of tea on a spirit-lamp. No fire, sir; the cook regrets as how the drat—the stove won't light, and there's no hot water."

The cook, in fact, at that moment was a black reminiscence of a woman, buried to the neck in a subtle and uncompromising flue which appeared to grow soot for the market, so largely did it yield.

"She, in fact, says, sir"—Phillips pinned up the blind, the cord was broken—"that the last servant here must have been a drat—that is, not strictly cleanly, and unless you'd take a cold bath, sir."

"Hang the cook! I can't take a cold bath—doctor's orders," said Acland, and upset his tea. "Hang the cook, and the flue, and you, Phillips!"

"Certainly, sir. You can just shave with this, sir," said Phillips pleasantly, proffering the hot water.

Acland dressed. He made some slight advances on his person with cold water and a sponge, but his clothes felt red-hot and stuffy, his shave was inefficient, and it only needed a vision of a grey and gusty morning to complete his discomfort.

"I wonder, Phillips," he said, "if the sun ever shines here?"

Phillips couldn't say. He placed his master on the path which led to the stables, but he regretted that he was much too busy to accompany him. The kitchen fire was now alight, and he may have thought of his breakfast.

Acland walked, quickly for him, up the road, which rose and fell with the regularity of ill-painted billows. The air was raw and cold; promise of rain in the sullen, red dawning. But exercise warmed his blood, the freshness of the virgin day cleared away his ill-temper. Visions of the Crimson Rambler's prowess

came in rosy and pleasant array. The horse should win races; race upon race, enough to pay for all this extravagance. The fresh air, the going from race-course to race-course, would completely cure him, and he would return to city life not at all the poorer, and strong as ever.

"I shall walk more," he thought; "take simpler breakfasts, and, having acquired an interest in it, always go to race meetings. Partridge will always tell me something to bet on, so I shall make my expenses." Here he came upon the white gate Phillips had told him of, and turned to the right off the road. The avenue was gravelly and tiring; it was unfortunately so fenced that one had to walk up, and Acland laboured visibly. Half-way up, however, he was hailed, and saw Captain Partridge, unshaven and chilled-looking, beckoning to him from a rise.

"Horses out here," he called; "come along."

Acland broke into a trot, climbed the paling, got winded and walked again, and going over the short, springy grass, breasted the rise, his heart full of excitement. He was not quite sure what he expected Crimson Rambler to be like; but in the depths of his mind was divided between the picture of Ormonde on the club wall and the fast trotter which Grattan drove in the Park.

"Here they all are," said Partridge; "we exercise early."

Acland looked, and saw a great many horses pacing in wide circles. Some wore hoods and light rugs, and some did not. Some cantered smartly on a wide track beaten by their own feet; but there was a sameness and monotony about them which confused him.

He had come expecting fiery gallops, smacking

whips, dripping spurs, and an excitement which was completely lacking. Moreover, where was his horse?

"That's Vesta," said Partridge, nodding towards a raking, restless brown. "He'll pick up a race or two yet, if they give him a chance. And that's Cuckoo. Won at Ascot, you may remember; fairly lost his field. And that's old Killaloe. They've smothered him lately, but he'll win again when he's at the right weight. And that's Smoker; entered for the Cambridge—7-8." Here he smiled.

"I should like to," said Acland, uninterested by these stars of the turf—"to see my animal; that which I have rented."

Partridge whistled. A stumpy little man on a pony came swiftly, hailed a horse bestridden by a stunted boy, and brought him up.

"This is Crimson Rambler, sir. Good 'orse; pleased to hear you've leased him—he'll do well later on."

Acland perceived a very tall, by no means taking, animal. There were certain points about the six-year-old Rambler: deep girth, galloping quarters, clean, strong hocks; but these were for a judge. He was ugly, with a ewe neck and a coarse whistler's head.

"He is not—not—very—pretty," said Acland faintly.

Partridge admired the Downs. Carson, the trainer, now off his pony, stared.

"But a good old horse," said Partridge, his voice uneven. "Stays and gallops, and is game as a pebble. Isn't that so, Carson?"

"Quite so, sir," said Carson to Acland. "Won at Gatwick, sir. Since then was fourth to King's Charmer, giving eight pounds, sir, creditable, and we hope, sir . . ."

Here Partridge whispered, and the head man stopped. Acland made a complete circuit of the Crimson Rambler, narrowly escaping a kick, and came to a horrified stop at his throat.

"Good God!" he said; "it's open. Did he? Eh! What!" Equine suicide being his first coherent thought.

Carson, the trainer, said "Gawd!" and leant against the Rambler for support.

Partridge grunted "Tube," still unsteadily.

"Makes a noise. Runs next week," said the trainer, recovering.

Acland smiled. Windsor was associated with Royalty and a river; it seemed a fit place to score his first win and acquire that delirious interest in racing which was to cure him.

"Very nice," he said briskly. "I trust a valuable race."

Partridge observed that Acland could see the horse each morning, and suggested breakfast. He and Carson, he said, were off North next day, to race on Monday, but they'd be back by Thursday.

The sporting novels had led Acland to expect rounds of beef and other delicacies dispensed by the trainer's pretty daughter; the reality was an invitation to walk a mile further to Partridge's house. Having no bicycle, he declined, and returned to blackly flecked fried eggs and sooty tea.

Breakfast over, there was the cottage, the rest-cure, and a dun pony with a wheeze, sent for him to ride. The day was grey and dark; in the distance one could see the sun shone, but a dull murk hung over the Downs. It was undoubtedly restful. Acland sat at his door and counted a carrier's van, two waggons, and a motor all passing in an hour. He slept then;

and woke chilly to a modest lunch of chops and no fruit. This over, he walked upon the Downs. Behind the house they dipped to distant woods, in front across the road and up a steep rise they stretched immeasurable. Rise and fall, waves of stone-pocked, coarse grass, dotted with flocks of sheep. Acland took a walk across the grass until the greatness of land and sky bit upon his nerves, and he hurried homewards to his cottage among the rabbit burrows, with some fresh notion of the puniness of mortality, and the greatness of God and Mother-earth, touching his city-dimmed brain. Your city man rules the universe; he is a great king in his network of smoke-stained bricks and mortar. 'Buses and cabs wait for his hiring; trains run for him; shops are built for him; and if anything offends his dignity he writes to the papers and signs it "An Aggrieved Taxpayer." But here, out in this unfenced land, one man was a mere dot on the face of the earth, no bigger than a wandering sheep, and not of so much account; a stranger might fall and die on those hills and not be found for a month or more.

So he sat at the door of his cottage and made, to cheer himself, abstruse calculations as to how much he might win over Crimson Rambler. He would have to put some money on the horse as well as his hundred and fifty stakes. The day slipped to evening, and evening to night, and Acland yawned dismally. He missed London; he missed his club; he got indigestion after tough mutton-chops, and wished all sheep left alive. Yet he slept soundly, used now to the musical clink, clonk in the sheep-fold, and the soot having disappeared, his hot bath was ready for him next morning.

But an after-breakfast visit to the stables was not

Interesting. Crimson Rambler was a mere vision of a thin rug and thinner legs; also, he was unsociable, and chased Acland from his stable with bared teeth and laid-back ears.

Acland felt aggrieved; the stable-boy was not communicative, and the day was again interminable—an amble on the dun pony occupying the afternoon. The sun shone, and the Downs were fair to see; but a sick man wears green spectacles, and his stretched nerves quivered until they hurt. The boredom of the big world, the nakedness of the cottage, were more than inert facts; they were becoming active enemies. As for the sheep, he would almost have paid for a Vickers' Maxim to shoot them with.

But all things end, and Thursday brought back Captain Partridge and two friends. Acland was even pleased to lose £2 at Bridge; he played indifferently; he could bear the Downs when others were with him, and his soul yearned for Windsor. "Except at Ascot I may say I have never been to a race meeting," he observed, as he counted out one sovereign, a half sovereign, and a quantity of small silver; it felt less like that. "I feel sure it will be delightful." Partridge, who had been his partner and therefore a saddened man, remarked shortly that to him it was more business than pleasure, and also that why the dickens a chap with every suit guarded should go spades with the score 0-26 was again more than he could fathom.

"It is quite exciting to me, the idea of winning a race," went on Acland unheeding. "Though I wish he had not got that tube in. I should prefer a complete horse—" He bade them good-night and heard the laughter in the room behind him. "Cheery souls—racing men—" said Alexander Acland, as he plodded cottagewards.

CHAPTER III

HOW RACING MAY NOT PROVE EXCITING

“The flag is lowered. ‘They’re off. They come!’
The squadron is sweeping on.
A sway in the crowd—a murmuring hum;
‘They’re here. They’re past. They’re gone!’”
—GORDON.

IT is an excellent thing to rise with high hopes in the morning. I have myself observed that to do so courts a day’s disaster, but we have enjoyed the exhilaration of the hopes, and must not grumble. On a still summer’s morning, with the dew on the grass, and the sun coming splendid from a bath of mist, it is hard to realise that we are born to mischance.

Acland read unceasingly, seated outside his cottage door; read until he was steeped in the swish of silk, the strained bodies of great horses, the hiss of whalebone, and bite of steel . . . the glory of rushing down to lead in a winner. Very few of his hero’s horses were engaged in handicaps; occasionally in spare moments they ran away with such little things as Cambridgeshires and Lincolns, merely when the weather was crisply glorious, and the trainer’s daughter could attend. Acland dreamt of Windsor; he was really bitten by the desire to win. He carefully noted the stakes against his weekly bills, and finally started by an early train to see his horse run.

There was no glorious weather, the grey skies massed and sulked and then wept unceasingly; a plashing, soaking rain.

The trains were dry and one hoped for amendment. Filled with importance, Acland chattered to everyone he could. He would like to have hung a badge, stamped owner, on his collar. The Crimson Rambler, he told them, to run this time in Captain Partridge's name, a most excellent animal — oh, yes, it is sure to win. One man shook his head at the weights; the others, impressed and obliged, wrote "C. Rambler" on cuffs and in pocket-books until Acland felt like a public benefactor. Yes, racing was interesting, a thing to live for, thought the little man, if only it would not rain.

The importance received its first check at the entrance, his assurance of ownership being coldly received, so that he had to pay like some mere mortal to get inside. The Windsor race-course lies low, the sheets of rain were rapidly turning the course into a slough; the mud in the paddocks clung — Acland found himself wandering, looking with rain-blinded eyes for a friendly face, and finding none. A bell clanged, numbers went up, and he got under cover to see, in a bewildered way, horses come out; gather huddled at the starting-gate, dash off; then as shouts rose one came out far in front and cantered leisurely home, the little monkey-like jockey peering backwards. Strange to say, it was the first race Acland had ever seen, and it was not exciting. He went down into the rain again and lighted on Partridge, positively clinging to him as he asked questions. Captain Partridge was abstracted, he vaguely pointed out the Rambler's whereabouts; he said he was afraid of the mud; but he looked about him mysteriously

and said a little on his horse—Slingstone—might be a good investment—then he slipped away, vanishing into inner sanctums where outsiders might not penetrate.

So this was the absorbing pursuit. Acland ploughed up the paddock and saw Crimson Rambler's hind legs; he left again, now very wet, looked at his card, and seeing Mr. Hall Vaines' Silkstones, decided Partridge had made a mistake, and got into the stand.

It was ten minutes before the crowd of plunging, chilled youngsters were started, and the wave of blurred colour seemed to pour towards him; he leant forward excitedly, the wave broke and opened, the roar rose high, a pink jacket slipped out, getting home comfortably.

But again it lacked excitement; until looking at the numbers he saw that Silkstones had won. Acland would have slapped himself, remembering suddenly that of course Partridge was only trainer—the seven sovereigns which he might have won embittered his day. He was wet, cold, hungry, and very lonely; there seemed no place for him amid these crowds. Then hope revived; the Crimson Rambler was saddled, and a small wizened youth awaited the ride—Acland stood importantly, getting into most people's ways. He remarked happily that he would be at the gate to lead him in.

"Better stay in the stand," said Carson, adjusting leaded cloths. "Very wet, sir; Rambler doesn't like mud"—this in a whisper.

"Such an exceedingly long-legged animal should not sink far," said Acland. "Is it not, then, what you call—fit—Carson?"

Carson was getting worried.

As fit as required," he said shortly, knowing the horse was reserved for later on. "What's that, sir? You want to know the orders, so as to direct the boy." And Acland smiled, imbued by sporting novels.

Carson flung him a heated glance, then looking at Acland's white face, he relented.

"Tell him to wait on his horses and come through when he can," he said, hiding a smile. "And don't you listen to a word the foolish blighter says," he whispered savagely to the boy.

Acland, having duly buzzed into the jockey's ear that he was to attend upon the animals and get through when suitable, strode down the paddock, rain forgotten. This was really racing—and ownership—Crimson Rambler, with the monkey-like boy perched upon him, was a fine animal. With visible reluctance he extracted five pounds, and was laid £40 to £5 with suspicious promptness. "Twos Playbox. Threes Nabob," rose the hoarse cry from the ring. "Coining," said Acland, going towards the stand, a betting ticket in his hand. . . . The horses were out; his heart beat quite fast. He watched a blue-and-red jacket and big bay. Now they were off, splashing through the mud; a white jacket in front; the Rambler, striding easily, lying fourth. Through rain-blurred glasses he watched—eagerly—now they were round, coming on, whips out—this was a race. The novels did not exaggerate.

Two horses, Nabob and Playbox, ran out, locked together, stride for stride, amid a mighty wave of sound . . . but where—where was Crimson Rambler? Acland shouted, he waved impotent, entreating hands at the boy; the big horse was ploughing far behind apparently hopelessly beaten. The two horses strode

on neck by neck; there was a rush, and the lightly weighted Chief squeezed home by a head.

Not even placed. Acland sat down heavily. That he did so on the lap of a fat old man who said: "My God! hang it, sir, I'm not a sofa," was of no moment to him. He was a deceived and dejected man.

Outside, in the rain he met Partridge, apparently undisturbed.

"Didn't win," said that worthy, "in that mud. Why, I told you he couldn't. Of course, you didn't touch him—a fiver?—oh, that was nothing.—Silkstones was a nice thing for you.—Don't look tragic—the Rambler will do you well yet when he's properly treated. See you Sunday."

See him Sunday—his horse had lost—he had doubtless incurred many expenses; he had flung away five pounds, and no one cared—Carson smiled—Partridge was indifferent—his overstretched nerves were breaking, when he met Phillips and announced his intention of going home.

"No train till five, sir," said Phillips happily. "I did that, sir, and also Silkstones—quite a coop. Fine sport, sir."

Acland looked round at it—the dreary, sodden paddock, the groups of drenched men, the complete absence of interest in him—an owner of a race-horse. He was aloof and alone; an unwanted unit in a crowd.

"Hang all racing, Phillips," he said testily.

"Certainly, sir," said Phillips cheerily; "meet you at the train, sir."

Shivering and wretched, Acland waited at the station, his feet growing lead-like, his head hot; a cup of tea his only refreshment. Further, his return

Journey was marred by the bitter glances of those he had given the tip to coming down; Fate ordaining they should again be his fellow-travellers.

He slept ill; the next day was wet, the Downs were mist-wreathed, limitless and grey. With an aggressive cold and bright red nose, Acland made his way to the stables. Carson met him with anxious inquiries, for Acland looked ill. The little man put them aside.

"Carson," he said "when does my horse run again?"

"Month's time, sir—Gatwick—" said Carson.

"And—will he win then, Carson?"

"Can't say sir." Carson coughed dubiously, knowing he would not. "A little heavily weighted, sir—he may win in September, sir."

July—August—September—Downs fresh air—sheep-bells, his horse running twice. Acland shivered openly.

Carson, being a kindly man, promptly advised whisky and bed—and for his own part produced some excellent cherry brandy, "For you look really ill, sir," he said "overstrained and done up."

Acland thanked him and drank—the glow lasted for a minute, then the tramp back under weeping skies put it out. There was the grey cottage, squatting naked and unashamed among the rabbit holes; behind it, the grey, limitless sky; the billows of the rain-swept Downs, to right and left the sheep-bells clanked softly—clink, clonk—in maddening, throatymusic. July—August—September. Partridge on Sundays. Crimson Rambler racing twice. A murmur of voices; the smell of dripping and toast drifted from the kitchen.

"Phillips!" Acland's voice rang in hoarse shrillness.

Phillips appeared instantly.

"Pack up, Phillips. I'm going back to London."

"For good, sir, or only you and I, and about the cook? . . ."

"Pack her up, Phillips; pack everything. I'll catch the 2.40 and have it out with Grattan . . ." Acland was on the verge of hysterics. "Pack the cook, Phillips."

"Certainly, sir."

Phillips slid to the kitchen; he first kissed the cook, as he was never to see her again, then whisked the kettle off the fire and upset boiling water on her feet.

"Lemons," he said, as her smirking squeak merged into a yell—"lemons, cook; the master's caught his death of cold and we're back to London. 2.40, we follow on the 4.10."

Here he flew to the sitting-room, mixing a cunning brew. Its glow ran through a fevered, wretched frame and did its work; Acland could even smile when the waggonette came— His last glimpse of the cottage included a vision of the cook and Phillips waltzing over the rabbit holes, then they drifted into the peaceful little village, bucked over the bridge—and Croxton lay behind.

The rest-cure had been a failure. A dejected, shivering little man ran past Woking with a shudder of active fear.

Dr. Harold Grattan was drinking his tea. He enjoyed the meal and took it in a drawing-room bright with flowered chintz, sun blinds shading the afternoon glare. It did not rain in London.

Grattan was pouring cream over piles of rosy strawberries when the bell rang and he shook his head, hoping he was not to be called away for some

urgent case. He heard his butler arguing, and then, there dashed in upon him Alexander Acland, with a feverish cold, a red nose, watering eyes and an hysterical manner.

"I *would* see you. Oh, Harry," he said, "I've done a fortnight of it. Do I look better."

Grattan pulled up the blind, a flood of sunlight fell on a strained, white face.

"You look a hang sight worse, old chap," he said pleasantly, "and you've lost weight. Fact is, if you were a woman I should expect you to sit down and cry."

Acland sat down. He had been glad at first to see sunshine, to hear the roar of London; now the shaded flower-scented air suddenly oppressed him. The rattle of hoofs outside, the filtering light, the old familiar noises of the streets were all threats of doom. He was back among them—worse.

The vastness of the brooding Downs, the weary boredom had all been in vain. He could have screamed in his sudden helpless irritation against his adviser.

"For nothing. For nothing," he said.

"Steady on," said the Doctor kindly. "Tell me, old chap. . . ."

Sympathy broke the strain; the wave of sorrows rolled high in a spuming mass. Country air, dead quiet, mutton-chops; sheep-bells, early rising, exercise, vast stretch of mighty downs, a Crimson Rambler, Windsor, rabbits—all this he had taken severally and collectively, day by day, hour by hour, and he was worse. He ran on until the Doctor's sympathy melted to a grin—to unrestrained laughter. Still, as he laughed, he rang sharply.

"A cup of black coffee and a liqueur brandy

quickly," he said to the man. "Oh! I know I forbade it, Alex, but there are occasions when one must use the biting dog's hairs. This is one. Now look here, don't glare at me. Did I tell you to take earth in a rabbit warren, damp at that, and rent a Crimson Rambler from the cleverest stable in all England. Job's patience is their motto. Report says Partridge only whispers the coups into his own left ear for fear the right might overhear. But he's straight; your rose-bush will win a race for you . . . when he's wanted to."

Acland commenced to babble about the prestige of the turf, and was checked by the cup of brandied coffee, his jangled nerves recovering as he drank.

"But I'm worse," he said piteously. "After it all, I was better here."

"Not actually worse." Grattan made a strawberry mash carefully. "You must try again, Alex, and get some value. Eschew Rabbits and Ramblers; but go back to your work and over-feeding, and you'll spoil a piece of Woking grass in eighteen months. Go to some friends, or as paying guest; hundreds of people want one."

Friends—visit. Acland considered. There was the ever-open invitation to Ballymacshane Castle. He might try that. In grudging tones he suggested it.

"Ireland!" Grattan rattled his teaspoon. "The very spot—fishing, shooting, hunting."

"But—" Acland came for strawberries. "I do not fish. I can't shoot or ride. If I were to go, I feel certain I should have to buy a horse."

Here he gave some particulars of his cousin-by-marriage's letters.

"Man, the very air's impregnated with the sport

bacillus; you'll catch it. Of course you'll hunt; you'll be pounding along in the rear, and falling off cheerfully by next December, able to speak to your waistcoat's last button with a clear conscience by January. If you want to get well, go. I wish I could come too. Leave fighting abstruse diseases, and merely endeavour to live as long as I can myself."

Very querulously Acland observed that his purse was not bottomless, and was exceedingly offended when Grattan remarked easily that the pit was, spending several heated minutes in asking as to whether this was a suggestion of his future destination, and obtaining mere silence in response.

But he took more advice and another cup of coffee, and knew when he said good-bye that the winds of Fate would blow his craft upon the Irish shore. No man wants to die. We cry to high heaven for death, and it smiles pitifully, knowing the fretted pigmy wants instead—life changed to its liking. Brave men face the end bravely, perhaps not realising it has come; but very few, save those who are unutterably weary, stretch greeting hands to the cold king who claims all life as his subjects.

So Acland wrote a long letter suggesting himself as a paying guest at Ballymacshane, discussing his health, the horrors of Croxton, and his doctor's orders at great length.

He waited then, enjoying London and its comforts, yet strangely stifled by its exhausted air.

The reply reached him by return, the smudged envelope having evidently been walked on by several dogs.

"Come over at once," wrote Standish Blundell.

"You may pay a trifle if you like, but I'd rather not. You'll get air and rest and company, and that mare I spoke of will match you for the winter. She's a mere suspicion of a whistler, but you could tie the reins to her tail, and she'd finish a hunt. There's a brown horse too, but you'll see for yourself, and we go to the sea in August, so you'll be well set-up.

"I'll meet you on Saturday at Cara Station ; it's a trifle of a drive from there."

Acland folded the letter. "Phillips," he said, "Philips, we leave on Friday night for Ireland."

"Certainly, sir," said Phillips easily. Then taking up the tray : "Shall you require a cook, sir ?"

Acland regarded his man suspiciously.

"No, Phillips," he said, "I shall not ; but I believe I shall require hunting-clothes, so must go out immediately. Turn on my bath." And he opened a letter from Partridge, asking if he did not mean to see his horse run at Gatwick, and adding that he was surprised at the sudden flight—the cottage left absolutely empty—also enclosing a bill for three weeks' training, and expenses to Windsor. "And I really wish all horses were gone to—the deuce, Phillips."

"Certainly, sir," said Phillips, going out.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE SECOND CURSE

“And destiny, steadfast in trifles,
Is steadfast for better or worse.”

—GORDON.

THE Irish mail, a white, steam-driven eel, slipped out of Euston, carrying Alexander Acland, unresigned to Fate, in a corner of a second-class carriage, and Phillips, his man, who had immediately found friends, playing nap in another. The train roared through a clear, starlit night. A passing flare and rumble in tiny stations; an important fretting personage at its stoppages; a thing watched from signal-boxes, passed carefully from man to man along the gleaming track, roaring into sleepy Chester, out along the Welsh coast where guttering little wavelets lapped the quiet shore, leapt shrieking at the mouth of the tubular; stopping to turn out Acland, very sleepy and cross, at Holyhead.

The *Leinster* received him, and cut her splendid way across the moonlit sea; rush of silvered foam from the screw, the long white track of the moon across the stretch of waters, the rise and fall of channel waves . . . there had been a wind . . . to witch the watcher's soul.

Acland could not have watched if he would. The mail boat cut through the choppy sea, quivered from

stem to stern, rolling with a long and hideous precision, and the little man was very ill indeed. Ten minutes sufficed for his undoing. Phillips considered the matter carefully, observed that the steward was attentive, bade his master good-night. "All second-class passengers," he said, "must go to their own place"—there were times when Phillips considered economy, it was three-and-sixpence.

Acland eyed him greenly . . . he had spent enough. Phillips vanished to sleep soundly, and come with tea to a desolate wreck in the morning. Soft dawn peered over grey Kingstown, but Acland lay in his berth and reviled the world. He did not go on by the early train, waiting till the last before he staggered on deck to get his first glimpse of Ireland. Jewelled, flashing waters; dingy houses clustering against a steep hill-side; soft Irish voices to hail him as he stepped ashore. He bought an Irish paper and walked to the station. They ran up past the stretch of the sunlit sea; the tide full in, the placid sea foaming softly to the edge of the line. Alighting at Westland Row, to find they had missed a connecting train, and were bidden by a cheery porter to "dhrive on or the Kingsbridge thrain would be surely left."

Acland, inclined to remonstrate, was given no time; but rushed sharply out and hurled with his belongings on to two jarvey cars.

"Dhrive on, Jarvey," said the porter, ignoring a furious tirade against inconvenience. "The gentleman is anxious for the 9.36."

"Anxious for it." Acland's last peevish snap was lost as he was whirled round; his short legs sawing the air, and the points of several things poking his spine

Phillips remained to tip the porter. Acland looked upon them as a disgracefully overpaid race, binding Phillips down to the smallest of douceurs, and his man, not being ungenerous, gave freely, and put the extra pence down to polish or its fellows.

The Dublin jarvey horse has no rival ; the little brown they drove sped forward at a dizzy speed ; diving through traffic, catching the wheels in tram-lines ; laying hold of her bit, and stepping out as though she had never known care.

"This," said Mr. Acland, when he adjusted his lost balance, and had jammed down his cap, "is an exceedingly speedy animal. I trust he does not trip."

His nervous soul leapt to a vision of how far he would fly before he struck the stony streets. They flashed round the corner into Dame Street as he spoke.

"Thrip, sthumble, is it?" The driver summed Acland up with a contemptuous glance. "Ye might throt her down the sides of hell ; own sither to Rocky she is, but she wint wrong."

They sped down a hill, and turned on to the Quays: Liffey, a hideous, slimy monster, crawled foul-breathed on their right. Dredges gathering filth from its polluted bed. The ugliest part of Ireland's ugly capital lay before the stranger. He shuddered at it, and was carried on, filled with a growing dismay, to be galloped up a platform by fiery porters and flung in headlong as the train began to move.

The well-regulated Londoner was filled with the sense of sudden and almost exhilarating adventure, as the first jerk flung him into a priest's lap, and he was carried forward to his destination. Ireland burst on him a few miles further. Green pastured, lonely ;

the distant hills still capped by the morning's mist, the new country stretched flatly at one side to a distant horizon. The ragged fences, the dearth of houses, the absence of English trimness, of office-stamped English order struck sharply to Acland's cramped soul. Kathleen had come through this, bidding it good-bye.

This was Erin, the restless, ever-discontented land. A true woman, scarcely knowing what she wanted, but always asking; always dissatisfied with what she got. Jealous of others' gifts, ignoring her own, and given twice as much as others to allay her peevishness. Who, with a woman's reckless fury at being thwarted or ignored, could order murder or pillage to appease her fancied jealous wrongs; who could weep for it five minutes later, heart-broken at her work. Could stretch her hand out, smiling with grey, lonely eyes, winning men to love her with all her whims and failings, her sunshine and sweetness. Whose sons never forget her; whose lovers are true to their lawless, childish love. A land which could lay tendrils round a lonely soul, and draw it to her till it came to rest under her soft skies.

The Englishman felt the witchery of it as he looked out. The day darkened; the hills were misty purple against a dim background, their crests shaded in thick vapour. A flat country now as they roared through the great bog of Allen, rows of firs gapping the edges; brown peat stretching interminably, melting to the dull skyline. The fields where the bog paused were covered with blue-hued rushes; waving with sheen of yellow and golden green as a gleam of sunshine touched them. Feathery, ragged bog cotton starred the peat; heavy meadow-sweet bowed in the ditches.

The turf was piled in long, neat stacks, black, brown, or red as they were old or new. A desolate region; patches of land which might have been used, waste; fields, easily drained, left sour and wet; cattle browsing among the rushes; little thatched cabins nestling in sheltered corners; everywhere the carelessness of Ireland; the lack of greedy snatching from the earth which makes her sons poor, and the peace brooding over the green land which causes those who know it to love it so dearly. So they ran on, with chill patter of showers and gleam of sun on the windows, until a growing vacuum, caused by the night's upheaval, ached in the place where Acland's breakfast should have rested. A luncheon-basket, found by Phillips, appeased it; tough chicken legs and gritty butter being speedily overcome by a whetted appetite, and Acland sniffed up the cool west wind as he threw out the bones. There was a kiss in its wooing, gentle breath.

They changed and changed again, until they reached the bye-line which led to Cara, after an hour's dull waiting at Tulloun. A tourist would have dashed out to see the town where Sarsfield fought, and Cromwell battered, but Acland crouched in the refreshment-room drinking tea, and cursing all doctors and ill-health. London beckoned artificial manicured fingers to the exile; at this hour she shone, filling her parks; offering arm-chairs and civilised food to deserving man.

The train was crowded. Folly had ordained their arrival upon a market day. Old women with baskets elbowed Acland to and fro as they clamoured for lost parcels; big men, some cheerfully drunk, lurched and smoked and spat, talking over their day; harassed ladies panted up and down

oppressed by important marketings which never came; brothers and husbands watched unsympathetically. Small boys detached themselves from the crowd, arriving hurriedly, and yelling, "O'Hara's—Mrs. Maguire," "Cassidy's—Mr. Bennett"—then, being vituperated by everyone whose anxiety they relieved, they disappeared, and the train started.

Acland travelling first, unwillingly—Phillips had taken his ticket—was wedged in a crowded smoking carriage, all the men talking loudly. "A three-year-old I got at Cahermee." This from a little red-headed man. "The finest mare you ever clapped eyes on, she's going to the show in—

"They doctored up the brute to sell, boiled his leg off, he was on three, Cassidy found it out. You can never trust those Clancy's—"

"Turned a turtle with me, the brute, if we hadn't landed on a haycock I'd have been flat as ten pancakes—"

Acland shrugged his shoulders. The air was clearly infected with this microbe of sport; though he considered that, novice as he was, he would not have bought a horse on three legs. Horses, races, and horses again; tales of swindles and shows, of fillies and colts, of banks and wall. He peered from the carriage window at the small fences by the line. Would he really find himself bestriding a four-legged animal, cantering up to those obstacles and leaping over? He thought not. Horses were expensive; surely it was madness to risk injuries by flood and field, across barriers built to check and not to be crossed, when a wise legislature had laid down flat high-roads. No; if he ever did come out, he would certainly remain on those highways.

"Excuse me," the train stopped, and the red-header

man who had risen and was groping at the rack, inverted a shower of small parcels upon the stranger's head — almonds (the paper gave way), preserved cherries, some fine powder resembling rice-flour, tin tacks, and three packages of hair-pins; the latter hopping off Acland's head as hail from frozen ground, and sliding green papered to his knees. "Shockingly sorry; so tiresome," the red-headed man commenced to collect — "the missus's basket, and she does gather things. Most sorry, sir . . . more hair-pins; thankyo."

"Not at all," said Acland politely, rescuing three tin tacks from his collar and a preserved cherry from his tie. "These too," he observed, laying them in the basket, and absently impaling the cherry on a tack.

A young fellow flicked the rice-flour from Acland's shoulder, and suggested further search for the tacks.

"Hang dangerous," he said. "I tell you one went up into my horse's foot two years ago and I couldn't save him—tetanus—poor old brute! You remember the Chief."

Everyone remembered the Chief; they had remembered the runs he had distinguished himself in, the big piece of timber he had jumped at the back of Malone's farm . . . the water by Blake's.

Acland, the tacks, and the groceries were immediately forgotten.

"Cara," intoned a porter, the bump immediately indicated the position of another lost tack, and Acland's yell of anguish was greeted with marked sympathy. He got out; bidden a cheery "Good evening" by his fellow-travellers. It was a small wayside station, rain dripping on it incessantly, its

platform seething with returning wayfarers. No one scanning the carriages for an arrival; no rush as he had pictured it of a merry, red-headed man to greet him with shouts of too eager welcome; no indication, in fact, of welcome anywhere. The Englishman made an unhappy way to shelter, Phillips descended on the van, the porter only paid attention to friends, and a heated guard rained parcels and curses from his stronghold, until the platform was strewn with one, and the train carried the others away.

Acland was just making up his mind that he had been forgotten, and said so to Philips, when a tall man in breeches and gaiters and a light overcoat detached himself from the crowd about the parcels, and looked carelessly round. He was lean and weather-beaten, with a profoundly melancholy face; a long brown moustache hid his mouth; sombre eyes looked out under black brows.

"Have you the fish, Patsy?" he asked, in slow, unhappy tones.

The porter replied that he had.

"An' near your honour was to havin' Lady Mustally's soles, she leppin' like a hooked throat with the temper. Dancin' back she come to fetch them, not content with that fine lump of a fish."

"And the meal . . . and the meat . . . the hamper from O'Hara's—I think I've nearly all." He appeared to ruminate; then spied Phillips, who had just collected his luggage, and was wrestling for his rugs from a furious old woman, who declared 'twas Katie's dhress home from O'Dea's. The lean man nodded at the pile of leather cases. "Did you see a stranger, Patsy?" he inquired slowly.

Patsy, in audible tones, pointed out the "fat little gentleman beyant," and the lean man looked.

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He came slowly up the wet platform without apology for his delay.

"How are you, Sandy," he said, as if they had parted an hour before, but his voice carried welcome. "I'd have looked for you, but I declare to goodness, unless you turned guard yourself you wouldn't get your own things on a Saturday for all the labels. "Are you tired?"

Acland, flushing, said that he was.

Sandy! a name he had avoided all his life—a name indicating his reddish hair. It grated on his ears. Yet he felt it must be his fate—

Standish said they'd better be going on. He eyed the pile of luggage, and said it was well he'd brought the cart. Patsy, with a basket on his back and his arms full, awaited orders. Acland came to the station door, Patsy finding a finger for his ticket. A green dog-cart with a restless black horse, and a luggage-cart drawn by an old, half-clipped, wheezy, white mare awaited them.

Standish directed that the mutton, the beef, the fish, and the jars of whisky were to go under the seat, O'Hara's basket to be strapped on behind. Acland, together with a good deal of meat wrapped in newspaper, and a length of limp cod, wrapped in nothing, commenced to pack in.

"That's right," said Standish gloomily; "we're nearly ready."

"Phillips?" said Acland, looking at his man, "Phillips?"

"Your man . . . oh he," said Standish Blundell, taking up the reins, "comes with the luggage."

It was perhaps retribution for that drive to Croxton. Phillips eyed the bags of meal and flour, the bulging hampers; he heard the old mare

wheeze, and his chill glance made the night look warm.

Standish, nodding at the mare, said "she didn't look like it, but she was once a good hunter. All right," he added, "let him off."

The black horse let himself off with a forward plunge of haste, and backward drive of heels; they slid out the station gate, and seemed to poise high above the horse on a steep hill. Cara village, rows of squallid dirty houses, with pleasant gleams of firelight from their doors, clinging to the slope. Acland was tired and cold, depressed by his greeting. This was not the eager Irish welcome he had been led to expect—which he had made up his mind to repress by English stolidity.

"Hold the horse a minute," said Standish. "I must speak to Halliday."

He jumped out, and Acland was left on the road, looking down at the black's wicked, laid-back ears, and with the novelty of reins in his hands. He found himself reiterating "Woa, poor good fellow," with nervous persistency.

"Did he wait for you?" inquired Standish mildly, as he returned, followed by a boy with a parcel of bread. "I was wondering could you stop him if he made off?"

Acland, with some bitterness, inquired if at that rate it had been wise to leave the animal.

Standish getting up, eyed his guest with cheerless wonder.

"Hadn't you the reins and a good whip?" he said. "What more could a man want?"

"Oh! nothing," said Acland tremulously, as the black horse, wincing from a sharp lash, dashed forward, the luggage-cart behind them was just

crawling down the hill—Mr. Phillips sitting stonily, sheltered by an umbrella. It was a mile further on before Acland realised that it was his. Their progress across a narrow bridge was accelerated by the throb of a motor which whizzed up to Halliday's on the road behind them.

They turned to the left, skirting a river; it ran willow-fringed and placid, golden shadows in its depths; rain flecks on its surface—then they left it, going to the right on to a narrow, treeless road stretching upwards to a range of bleakly towering hills—the black horse trotted fast, but Acland was painfully conscious of the whisky-jar bumping against his feet; he thought the parcel rubbing against his left leg was the meat, and he *knew* that a slimy softness at his left ankle was the cod-fish.

Rain, soft and thick, fell incessantly, a dreary, depressing drizzle; the sky, tired of soaring, pressed down to rest on the earth—they drove through the flat, green country, fenced by banks, stretch upon stretch of pasture . . . a fox-hunter's heart would have warmed to it . . . Acland merely thought it ugly. . . . Lack of cultivation; unthriftiness; too much grass; the parrot cry he had read in the newspapers. . . . He reiterated it now—with suggestions for the swift furthering of prosperity in Ireland. "Cultivation," he said precisely, ". . . grain, home supplies. . . . Oh, to hold the reins, certainly." Standish was lighting an enormous pipe; he snapped the bowl down and snatched the reins back.

"More cultivation," proceeded Acland.

"And how in the name of goodness could we be dragging our heels through it if every field was a ploughed garden?" stormed Standish Blundell, with

conclusive contempt. "Singing songs you should be to see the green grass all round you."

Alexander Acland had never felt further from singing songs, but he ceased the discussion upon agriculture.

The sadness of his late wife's second cousin was unbroken; his voice was a dirge; the lines on his face were set in deepest melancholy. He talked on, asking his chilled little guest questions, but he never smiled.

Standish was sorry to hear of broken health . . . it was about at the point that Acland missed his umbrella . . . but the little man tried to forget the rain as he plunged willingly into the tale of his ills and his cure, the rabbits and Crimson Rambler.

Standish, listening with silent sympathy, flicked the black.

"He would be worth a fiver," he said, "that horse . . . when they do loose him."

To have enlarged on your health for ten minutes and find that only the horse aroused interest was annoying. Acland smiled sourly, and felt he detested Ireland.

They turned again, winding through rain-washed hedges under mist-hooded hills. To the left the ground lay low; there was meadow-sweet in the ditches, and soft, pungent scented bog-mint. Thatched cottages, crouched behind manure heaps; curly-headed children playing happily in the rain, unheeded by careless mothers; constant good evenings from passing men; occasional stoppages, resented by the black, to ask for a sick cow, for the bay colt that was hurt, and so the drive went on, seemingly interminable.

"How far do you count it?" Acland moved, feeling his heel slide on the cod.

Standish said it was a good ten miles—and Acland wondered fretfully that his host had no motor. To which Standish replied that they were the Devil's pups for cars, throwing you out where you'd least expect it, and the conversation languished. To be stimulated by the distant throb of a car coming behind them, so that the black horse tried to get the trap off the road into the ditch, and Standish, jumping out, clung to his head, while Acland, rocked amid a sea of parcels, held the reins and prayed. It flashed past; the driver looking round carelessly to see if they were still intact.

"Like Graves' chauffeur," grumbled Standish, as he got up. "Just a look and past, no matter what you're driving. Have done, you schemer. But wasn't there two in it? Graves is away."

Acland had not looked, he had only eyes for the ditches, and said so openly.

They drove on, sniffing a trail of petrol, along the base of the hills, a high, ragged bank with a yawning ditch fencing the road.

For the first time a flicker of what might have been a smile touched Blundell's face.

"I killed a horse there," he said.

Acland said: "What a loss," with intense sympathy.

"Loss, you might say so;" but the flicker dwelt. "A slashing five-year-old, with the power of Hercules in his hind legs. We ran from Reshe behind the hill, right up the valley; hounds going like smoke, and but four of us away. He breasted the hill here with the hounds on to him, and our horses fairly stood still at it. I got off and ran, so that when I was at the top, the others were crawling up, and a tail on the hunt like a woman's

court dress. We came slap down here—I knew the fox was making for the drain at Moloney's, and knew, too, this bank was a teaser, but we went at it." Standish pulled up the black, waving his whip about that furious animal's ears. "Well, he was blown, and anyhow, he missed his legs and broke his back, poor brute! so I could do nothing but get on, and we ran into our fox in the fourth field below there."

"Get on, if your horse was dead?" gasped Acland, struggling in the deep waters of the tale.

"Faith, I took to my heels—what could I do?—and just below was Moloney's old Jennett, and the boy taking him in. Up with me—there were only gaps, and I sailed along, giving the Jennett all I knew with the crop. The master, and a few others that got up, breaking their sides with laughter. I got the brush, I tell you."

"But—how awful!" Acland felt certain now that he would not leave the roads. "A horse killed. I presume the skin is almost valueless. A horse gone for nothing."

Blundell looked at his relative by marriage.

"Save us," he said softly; then after a pause: "The hunt was worth a horse, Sandy. We must teach you something besides how to get well."

His momentary excitement died out.

"We're here," he said, as they arrived at a high wall, and they turned in at open iron gates, the avenue bordered by thick, well-kept laurels; a stagnant stretch of water was crossed by a wooden bridge—they could not see the house—Standish observing that they drew the laurels, they left smooth avenue for crunching gravel and Ballymacshane Castle was reached.

A tall, narrow house, plastered white; high, thin

windows pocketing the walls; steep stone steps leading up to an open door. But Castle . . . a plaster turret poked unreasonably from one side, a damp flag waving on it; otherwise, Ballymacshane was an extremely ordinary house—not even a pretty one. A few flower-beds protected by piles of thorns, were cut on the sloping turf beyond the gravel; several coops and wire-runs dotted between them, a positive wave of yelping dogs poured out as they came up, surrounding the trap. One, a red setter nosing determinately at the fish; streaking Acland with muddy paws as he climbed down. A lean man with a squint, who came for the horse, induced some order—inquiring hastily for bandages and sweet oil. Being appeased with two packages, he lead the black away, and Standish turned. “Down, Catty—down, Rep. You’re welcome here, Sandy,” he said, “for little Kathleen’s sake. You schemer!” Any further speech was checked by Catty gently taking the cod by the tail, eyeing them with liquid, appealing eyes and slashing her feathery tail furtively. “The ruffian,” said Standish, “take the cod, Mary Anne; you can’t scold her.”

But he was welcome. Through his host’s unabated gloom a note in the voice rang true. Cold, tired, hungry, engulfed in dogs, Acland smiled as he came in; the solitude of the Downs was not before him.

The square hall was littered with many things; old sporting prints, whips, brushes, and foxes pates half hid the dirty walls. A small billiard-table was piled high with parcels, a packet of Spratt’s chicken food, an open bag of dog-biscuits and two saucers of milk, a pair of goloshes and a garden fork—another pair of goloshes stood by the open door, a muddy spade lying across them.

A shrill voice cried to them to leave Lucy out as she would hunt the tabby kitten, and they went to the right into a long, narrow room. July though it was, a wood fire blazed cheerily.

"Aunt Catty and Aunt Susie," said Standish. "Here's Sandy—Kathleen's husband."

Two old ladies bobbed up from deep arm-chairs, two gentle voices bade him welcome and called him Sandy—the aunts sat far apart—some magnificent blue Persians occupying the hearth-rug—a crowd of kittens crawling across one arm-chair.

"Sit down; you are chilled"—Miss Susie pushed him into her own chair—"but do mind the chickens."

A faint, sleepy twittering came from below the chair—with pride Miss Susie moved some flannel and showed him a nest of sleepy dots, cuddled close.

"If it were not for Catty's cats," she said, "I should never lose one."

Miss Catty returned the charge with a tale of a cochin china cock and a now eyeless kitten—and Standish inquired for dinner. It would be ready, he was told by eight.

Acland regretted his inability to change; Miss Susie reproved Standish for leaving the man upon the luggage-cart and showed Acland to his room . . . a gloomy, rep-hung apartment, smelling of disuse. To his intense surprise, Phillips stood at the table laying out dress clothes. Had old Nancy then, flown?

"Motor car, sir," said Phillips pleasantly, "Met it at Halliday's and asked the chauffeur to bring me on; in fact, I think we passed you on the way, sir."

"Passed us! Hang nearly upset us," exploded Acland angrily, thinking of the black's frantic

plunges, of the rolling sea of parcels, the unguarded ditch yawning for its prey.

"Certainly, sir," said Phillips, unmoved; "so I saw, sir. Most enjoyable drive, a fine country, sir."

Acland thought of his progress with whisky-jar and cod, and said little; it took all the refreshment of changed clothes to calm his irritation.

The dining-room was large; wax candles drowning in a sea of gloom . . . the soup was watery: his friend the cod's middle-cut, appeared in a spotted veil of white sauce (the spots represented by flour lumps). There were chops and chickens both admirably cooked, Miss Susie giving him details, as he ate the latter, of its parentage, childhood, and being a cock, unhappily necessary death—the potatoes were balls of flour instead of little lumps of wax, and the fat green peas, a salad, ripe strawberries and yellow cream were perfection.

The parlour-maid, named Mary Anne, smiled as she waited, proffering items of suddenly remembered gossip to the old ladies. A slight dignified pair, in old-world dresses, with grey hair piled high, topped by lace caps. If the food was plain they ate off Worcester, a maze of blue and red and gold, and the decanters were Waterford glass, their sharp facets gleaming—the cats and dogs dined also chumping noisily.

As the Miss Blundells left, Standish pushed the port decanter towards his guest.

"They've gone to spend the evening wrangling over the cats and chickens" he said sadly. "What do you say? After all, they can't ride, they don't shoot—they might as well be fighting."

Acland proffered no comment but took port, knowing it was bad for him . . . they went into a

low-ceiled smoking-den, off the dining-room. Over his pipe Standish peered hard at the Englisman's sandy hair, his round, clean-shaven face and mild blue eyes. A face moulded by its work, anxious lines below the eyes, puckered wrinkles at the temples—the face of a man who had lived life's life instead of his own; who, with a strong sense of his own importance, was with all a mere business machine. Spending sleepless nights weighing the chance of investments which should bring him an income he never spent—a typical city-bred Briton, cast suddenly into these strange waters. He raised his eyes to find his host's fixed upon him. Standish took out his pipe. Acland attuned his face to the expected sympathy.

"I was wondering," he said slowly "what Kathleen saw in you."

A purple flood of shocked displeasure swamped the yellow pallor of Acland's cheeks.

"And she liked you," said Blundell, unconscious of offence. "She said so. If she'd been marrying you just for a home she'd have written it to me--no, she wrote she'd met someone she could care for. She, with Dick Moloney dying for her—and a Colonel Maguire—and Ned Graves that she ran away from, and myself, though I was but a cousin, still there was the place and the horses here if they'd been a chance of it. . . . Yet . . . who can judge a woman. She liked you, Sandy, though, and we'll like you and make you well . . . for you look uncommonly ill."

Offence was impossible—Acland merely muttered, and thought he would go to bed.

"Sleep well," said Standish, "and get up when you like—there's no law or order at Ballymacshane."

CHAPTER V

AT BALLYMACSHANE CASTLE

"Under yonder rise there's a clump of trees,
The shadows look cool and broad."

—GORDON.

THE pitching of steamers, the jolting of trains, the long drive in the rain proved too much for an ailing man. Acland slept fitfully, enduring one hideous nightmare of the Miss Blundells wrangling, to wake and find it was the grey Tom entertaining callers on the roof. From that point he tossed and tumbled with burning head and chilled feet, until the many-voiced quiet of the country banished sleep for ever. Cawing rooks, twitter of unpleasantly early birds, cocks shrilling welcome to the dawning, wise hens grating out their harsh warning of coming rain. Acland groaned and tossed, feeling exceedingly ill, then a heavy bang upon his door jarred him into fuller consciousness.

"The masther wants to know, sir"—a diffident nose rounded the door,—“whether you'll go to the seven or the twelve.”

The Englishman sat up furiously, ejaculating “What? The seven or the twelve. What!”

“Mass, sir. He goes early himself and the ladies late.”

"Good Heavens!" said Acland, lying down furiously. "I'm not a Catholic."

The diffident nose vanished, its owner muttering apologies and regrets, and Phillips appeared with tea.

The rep curtains reft asunder revealed a grey and drizzling morn, but Phillip, seeing his master's face, had no eyes for the view. He sped swiftly for Standish.

Acland's first day at Ballymacshane was a dull, fevered nightmare. His head ached, he felt very sick, and he lay miserably supine, enduring visits of unwished-for sympathy . . . of Standish long and sad, staring at him and murmuring, "There now!" unhappily; of Miss Susie with boiled eggs and Miss Catty with beef-tea arriving together and wrangling over his unhappy body; of a heated argument at the door concerning chicken broth, and Miss Susie's tearful decision as to the death of an Orpington cock. All this came and went with the fevered hours, until his over-shaken being recovered, he was able to enjoy tea and dry toast, and felt life was a thing to be lived.

He slept dreamlessly; to be awakened again by the insistent cackle and caw of fowls below his window, slurred over yesterday in his wretchedness. A silver shaft of sunlight striking through the red curtains made a quivering bar across the room. He endured the cackling for a space, then tugged at a dusty woollen tassel until Phillips appeared hurriedly, explaining that he had expected his master to sleep late.

"Late"—Acland pointed to the window—"with those fiends holding a concert below there. Stop them, Phillips."

Phillips pulled back the curtains and unbarred the shutters, a flood of sunshine, of fresh, rain-washed air pouring into the room. He then leant out "hooshing" gravely, and having apparently received outside assistance, presently withdrew a satisfied head.

"Miss Susie's pet fowl, sir, I understand from the dairymaid below, Ellen, sir, that directly Miss Susie gets up she throws them food from her bedroom windows, next to yours, sir."

Acland might have been understood to confide thunderously to the blankets that he wished Miss Susie herself— The clatter began again.

"They have all returned, sir," said Phillips cheerfully. "A beautiful morning, sir."

"Chook, chook, cho-ook," piped Miss Susie, from the next window. "Chook a-chookee, chooke-e-e, chook."

"Turn on my bath," stormed Acland, flinging a pink pyjamaed form from the four-poster. His watch said seven. Late hours, after all, compared to Croxton and the chill watching of the Crimson Rambler.

"No bath-room. Certainly, sir," and Phillips left.

Acland went to the window. He looked out high over the tops of trees. Massed in soft gauziness, tender green and glowing copper, dark firs, tassled larch, sycamores, broad-leaved, sturdy elms branching widely, and over them to a great stretch of pasture-land, flooded in golden light.

Beyond the billowing land a range of hills, too clearly seen for settled weather; shadow flecked by passing clouds, they barred the blue distance.

A west wind blew, sporting with the world; sweet scent of mignonette and carnations drifted from

the bush-veiled flower-beds. The pond was a long ribbon of silver, stately swans on its still surface.

"Bath, sir, not very hot, sir," observed Phillips, with gentle encouragement. "Cook promises a special kettle to-morrow, sir."

Acland left the window to splash in soft, peat-scented water, and having returned, feeling greatly refreshed, to dry himself, to retire blushing to his toes as he observed Aunt Susie feeding little chickens upon the lawn. Clearly, an early household. Clatter of hoofs heralded the advent of Standish, driving a horse in long reins, passing on to the field beyond the hedge, with "g' ups" and whip-flickings. Two cows stood outside the paling, lowing impatiently. Acland, dressing by the window, now observed Phillips, instead of returning to his duties, coming out, cup in hand with the dairy-maid, and drinking a quantity of foaming new milk with evident pleasure. Further, the aggrieved master beheld his man taking grave place upon a three-legged stool and endeavouring to milk, spurred on by merry giggles from the maid. The outraged cow having immediately upset him by a well-directed kick, he sprawled over backwards, but arose and stood smiling in the sunshine, forgetting a now fuming employer.

"Dear me," said Acland, with resignation, as he put in his own links.

He found his way down to the hall; the drawing-room, he observed, was undusted and chaotic, and the housemaid was moving chicken coops outside. She dashed in now, smiling, announcing that her heart was scalded from chickens. Having flicked some dust from the tables to the ground with her apron; thrown two whips off a pile of coats on to the floor;

piled the Spratt's chicken food on to a rat-trap ; upset the cat's milk, and muttered : " There ye are now, nate an' dacent," she ran off smiling to the drawing-room, where she appeared to knock over several chairs in her onslaught.

" Dear me," said Acland, again going out.

Phillips was returning to the yard carrying a pail of milk and the stool. The air was a caress, the world smelt washed and fresh. He was hailed from the lawn, and found himself in the wet grass helping Miss Susie to move her coops (the turf was pock-marked with jaundiced trampled squares), and soon was anxious as she, lest one of the wooden frames should crush a fluffy, bright-eyed chick. In fact, he only struck work when, going on to some boxes, he was bidden to remove sitting hens from their nests and give them a walk. Having been severely pecked by one, and almost overturned by the flurried exit of another, Acland left, answering an untimely call from the stables. The yard was behind the house ; a big square, whitewashed and neat ; rows of green painted doors ; sound of chumping issuing from them as one came nearer.

Standish, observing unhappily that he was glad to see Sandy better, called him to the stable doors.

" Three-year-olds," he observed. " Some going to the show. You might see one you'd fancy. The mare I've laid out for you is at grass, but I've some nice ones here. Now, here's a colt," he swung a door open to show a great slashing brown with tremendous power behind, and all the coarseness of outline which promised great things later on.

After the satin-coated, slim-legged racers, the brown struck Acland with dismay.

" He's surely a very large animal," he observed

timidly, anxious to please. "And what exceedingly thick ankles and round feet. I am sure they must support him excellently."

Tom the groom muttered: "Support; the Lord protect us!" and leant against the wall.

The brown had his faults, and one was flat, heavy feet. Standish flung a suspicious eye on his guest and pushed him out, banging the stable door.

"Here's another, Holy Robin, we call him." The Irishman opened a further box. "By St. Serf, and the dam by the Warbler. He'd carry you and be worth a bit of money next year."

Holy Robin was a very bright chestnut, with four white legs; a light middle and doubtful hocks.

"He'll gallop," said Standish, "and he must jump. I've had the irons on him as a mere precaution, but he'll stand. He'd do a day a week for you, and perhaps pay for your season's hunting."

Acland smiled, but remembered the Crimson Rambler and sighed.

"And I'd let you have him for well—eighty," said Standish, with that sudden burst of loving-kindness which is part of a horse copier's outfit, and deceives unwise mankind.

In his heart Blundell knew he would have jumped at sixty with those doubtful hocks.

"That," said Acland precisely, "is surely a large sum, as he is not yet a trained hunter, and are not the undulations on his hind legs what are spoken of as a blemish?"

Here Tom, who had left his last door-post, fell against another, muttering: "God Almighty!" with monotonous fluency.

"I should require," said Acland, tempted by the

glowing, smooth chestnut coat and the look of heeding, "something so gentle."

"He's a lamb," observed Standish gloomily.

Ellie, the dairymaid, passed with clattering, empty cans; the equine lamb, scared towards his stable roof, came down, plunged up on all fours, and wheeling round, flung his hoofs within an inch of Acland's nose. That gentleman, dashing for safety, carried away Tom as he fled, and spun with the head groom on the paved surface till they recovered balance.

"Great Heavens!" said the Englishman, apologising profusely. "Suppose an animal were to behave like that when I was upon it?"

Standish eyed him with a melancholy consideration, wondering what manner of man he had bidden to his home. Acland returned to gaze at Holy Robin with some admiration.

"I should really like that animal," he observed; "but as to riding him—"

Tom burst in with hurried assurances concerning training and the discretion which comes with age, but Standish, now patting the white blazed nose thrust out over the door, remarked "that he thought, after all, it would be a case of White Mary from the luggage-cart, bellows to mend and all. . . ."

Here for the first time Acland saw Standish Blundell laugh. A sudden twice-given bray of Haw Haw, and then bitten off as his gloomy face settled into its habitual lines.

"Hey, Sandy"—he smote the little man a reeling blow on the shoulder—"we'll try to make a sportsman of you. Man, when you've cut a few voluntaries you'll laugh at a buck jump. Didn't Black Rod, Tom, rear up outside there, and fall back with me into the manure heap. God be praised it was there,

for if he'd passed it, I'd have been a pancake on the stones, and my next ride in John Cleary's hearse. There's the bell, Sandy. Oh, go easy, Eliza."

Eliza was clattering a bell out of a back window with feverish energy.

Robin, the lamb, made two complete circuits of his box, and then leant against the wall in cowed astonishment. There was assorted noises of affrighted movements from other boxes.

"Have done with it, Eliza," commanded Standish. "Couldn't you run out to me and not be making that clatter."

Eliza, remarking huffily that the least they might do for a stranger was to give the bell a wallop, withdrew, and they went in.

The dining-room looked out on a box-edged garden; a little plot sacred from chickens and gay with old-fashioned flowers. The big windows were open; scent of roses, stocks, and mignonette, of drying grass from distant meadows drifted in. Acland had learnt to hate his breakfast since he might no longer whet a dulled appetite with hot sauces and peppered kidneys. But he forgot this now. Freshly caught trout; brown hot loaves; golden Irish butter, really fresh eggs, honey; tea, thick with floating cream. What a difference to that meagre table at Croxton, and the eternal quiet of the Downs mouthing at the narrow windows. He ate, and was even friendly to the clawing cats, putting down his trout skeleton for the great blue Persian with complete good-will, the fluffy brute growling fiercely, tiger-hearted, as he crunched his meal. The old ladies quarrelled gently: one of Aunt Susie's white leghorn chickens had died, and

Aunt Catty's blue Persian was accused of having looked at it and terrified it to its end.

Counter-charge by Aunt Catty to the effect that the Orpington hen and twelve chickens had got into the garden and destroyed a whole seed-bed. Much angry argument, and final departure of the two old ladies to order dinner arm-in-arm, wrangling as they went.

Standish was going off to some distant fields—he apparently had a busy morning before him—to see divers cows and calves, mares and foals, meadows and men.

“I'll not take you, Sandy,” he said, rising from his breakfast. “You're not fit for a long walk. Stay quiet outside, man; get a little colour into your pasty cheeks, and we'll drive to Castleknock after lunch. Nora Hartland's dying to meet you, and so's little Evie—Kathleen's cousins, in a way. We'll drive Bobs; the black has a sore breast from the hills.” Acland gave silent praise to a considerate Heaven. “So take your ease, Sandy.” The melancholy man had a kindly heart. “I declare you've circles round your eyes like a cinder-track. Go out under the beech; I'll tell that man of yours to put chairs. He's a handy fellow.”

The kitchen was evidently underneath, for now heated voices rose faintly. Aunt Catty wanted ducks for dinner; Aunt Susie roast-beef; also, Aunt Susie declared the cats had eaten the best part of the cod, and then the voices died away.

Acland went out. There were wicker chairs under the big beech; the sunlight filtered through a chequered softness. Lying back, tired now, Acland could see one of the hay-fields; machines tossing and whirring; men building little cocks of grass; others,

further off, raising up the higher things called "tram-cocks;" bubble of laughter and gossip, yet the work going speedily. This was quiet, but not the deadly brooding stillness of the Downs.

Aunt Susie flitted to and fro, cooing to various families; once her voice rose in distress, and a fat woman, clearly the cook, appearing, a hideous surgical operation was wrought with a feather upon a drooping brood. He could hear Aunt Susie bewailing the advent of some fell thing called Pip.

The big cats strolled about, honourably avoiding the chicks; they hissed and spat at passing dogs, but without enmity, merely from habit; in fact, later, the great blue Persian and the setter sat blinking in the sunlight side by side, the dog's fringed paw thrust on either side of the cat. Horses came out; he saw Holy Robin—now disguised in many trappings, with an aggrieved head tied to his chest—and other animals going up and down. Tom was always busy.

A high hedge stood to the right of the trees; it was thick and impervious, but judging from constant swishing of wet garments he divined it was a drying-green, and thither Phillips, not yet understanding the land's geography, came with Ellie, the dairymaid (who was also the under-housemaid and the laundress), to help her with her work.

Following the dump of a laden basket, Acland could hear her uplifted tones declaiming that the world was too clane entirely, and she was three hours and more "possin' and scrubbin' for the life."

Having admired the starching of Phillip's shirt, there came a pause, and she bade him leave.

His reply elicited a pleased squeak and a request that he should give over for an English schamer,

"An' let ye go, Mr. Phillips, if ye plaze," Ellie declared shrilly, "an' I goin' to lay out Miss Susie's dhrawers."

Steps announced Phillips' most proper exit: he was a modest man. Ellie remained, singing the "Lost Bard of Erin" very much out of tune.

"The assurance of them sthiff-lipped English," she observed aloud—presumably to the pantaloons.

Acland, recalling the cook, remarked to Catty, the red setter who had come to his feet, "that he feared Phillips was inclined to trifle."

The morning waned, its moments broken by a soda, milk, and a plate of strawberries, one brought by each little aunt. He dozed, and woke blinking to stare at a merry girl's face peering at him through the horses—grey-eyed, brown-haired, brimful of mischief, red lips quivering saucily.

"I didn't think you'd wake. I came to peep at you. I'm Evie Hartland." She came into the shadow dressed in a holland coat and dark habit skirt. "I rode over—we're all anxious to see you—you know, more especially Nora; I hardly remember Kathleen. They called that setter's mother after her, you know, when she died. Ah, I'm sorry," she said, as Acland sat up and she saw his face quiver. He put his hand down touching the dog's silky coat. "I'm sorry," she repeated. "You see you're a kind of cousin by marriage. My grandfather married Kathleen's great aunt, or something like that, you know. And we're very glad to see you, and you must get well—you do look wretched."

"Thank you," observed Acland gravely.

"London must be a horrid place if it makes one so white." Miss Evie Hartland had a ready tongue.

"But oh, it must be fun. I envied Kathleen—theatres

and restaurants and driving everywhere in hansom cabs—"

"I," said Acland precisely, "use 'buses—the saving is simply enormous—I should say to a business man like myself it must amount to quite £20 at the end of the year."

Then Evie suggested contemptuously that one had to run after 'buses, and £20 would not even buy a decent horse.

Acland gasped a little, staring at her. "Great fortunes," he said pompously, "are made out of small savings."

"Take you three years to get a hunter out of it," said Evie cheerfully. "I hope you're not a screw, Cousin Sandy. We all spend double our incomes over here. Now, good-bye; we shall see you this afternoon."

She left whistling, the dogs running in her wake—a clatter of hoofs and she was gone.

It was dawning on Alexander Acland that she was perhaps the prettiest girl he had ever seen in his life.

So being disturbed, he left his tree and pottered about a mighty, walled garden with a profusion of gnarled, half-pruned trees, laden with fruit—plums faintly spotted, cherries ripe and unripe, wealth of apples, two gooseberry squares, beds of strawberries, groves of raspberries, monster plots of cabbages, unending drills of peas going to seed unpicked, peaches leaning little green bodies against the sunny southern wall; great borders of flaming hollyhocks and poker plants, neglected carnations, blooms of roses, and four men working in desultory fashion directed by a silver-headed and sour-faced old person who did nothing.

A great basket of picked peas was being handed to a red-headed damsel of tender years. She likewise took three heads of cabbage under her arm and a pile of lettuce into her apron, then she went away, directing one Michael Dyer, not to be above recalling the raspberries for the tart for dinner. Evidently a kitchen-maid.

Acland gazed down the long vistas of the walks.

He observed that the garden might make a positive fortune. It was large enough to supply three households.

The gardener, with a glance of contempt, disappeared grumbling into a grove of raspberries, and Acland feeling a new peace with the world went back to his chair.

CHAPTER VI

HOW A LAW-ABIDING BRITISH SUBJECT FOUND HIMSELF INVOLVED IN STRANGE AFFAIRS

"Dear me," I exclaimed. "What a place to be in!"
—*Ingoldsby Legends.*

"WILL I carry the black horse to the gate, sir," inquired Tom, "or will ye bate him from the dour?"

Acland pricked his ears. He had breathed a thanksgiving because the black was laid up. What new danger was this?

Standish, unmoved but thoughtful, decided that Tommy and Martin Mead should come round with their cart-whips and they'd start from the yard.

"The little schemer won't go until we get him past the gate," he said easily to Acland, "and, as we're not hurried to-day, we may as well master him."

Acland said "Certainly!" faintly.

Ten minutes later, ashamed to suggest his walking down the avenue, he found himself upon one side of a car, with Standish on the other, and a mild-looking bay with a hogged mane between the shafts, two boys armed with whips waiting.

"Go on," said Standish, taking up the reins.

The bay went . . . as far as the gate . . . then, with a ducking swirl which any dancer might have envied, he was round again and stood still.

Tom dashed him back, Standish smote, the carter's lashes fell like hail . . . Acland, clinging closely, found himself involved in a whirl of whips and bad language. They were urged through the gate, past Aunt Susie, who callously remarked that she hoped they would be careful not to come on to the lawn; down the steep hill, the bay ducking and swerving, plunging from the punishment he received.

As they came to the bridge across the narrowing pond, he suddenly screamed with futile rage, reared up, and flung himself upon the avenue. Acland's curving flight ended in a barberry bush. Standish, better prepared, merely sprang off and contemplated the quivering but triumphant horse.

"So he thinks he has us beaten with that new trick," he said sadly, for the bay would not get up. "Does he? Run up Tommy and Patsy for bundles of straw and some matches, and you, Sandy, come out of that bush, you're like the goat in the desert. Put your foot on the step and be ready to jump when we move him."

Acland emerging, inquired hotly if Standish really meant to go on with that demoniacal animal.

"Do you think we'll pull the harness off him and take him back to eat oats? He'll always go like a sheep once he's outside the lodge gates. Oh, lie there, my boy! I've a surprise for you." For the bay was positively smiling, believing he had conquered. "Look lively, Sandy," said Standish unsympathetically.

Acland came, but his looks were not lively, the barberry bush had proved a very prickly haven.

He placed an unwilling foot near the car; Tommy and Patsy doubled down behind bundles of straw,

and in their wake streamed the cook, the kitchen-maid, Eliza, and Phillips, all running hard, the cook carrying an oil-can.

Standish arranged bundles of straw under the bay horse, who now positively beamed at them; the cook was with difficulty restrained from using the oil. There was a sudden flare of matches, a crackling of dry straw, of little spurts of flame running blue and pink. The bay horse reconsidered matters. He arose, with a straining of leather and creaking of bolts, and took the avenue at a mad gallop to get anywhere, it mattered not where, away from the fire demon which had awoke beneath him.

As they swung out the gate and turned left handed, Standish, quite unmoved, spoke.

"Will you take the reins, Sandy, while I light my pipe?" he said. "That fellow won't lie down again in a hurry; he's smouldering still."

They drove down a narrow road to Ballymacshane village. It was the Englishman's first real glimpse of Ireland. The squalid little houses clinging to the steep hill-side, the children playing in the centre of the road, the tiny shops. A butcher's, a square hole of stained horror, where a sheep hung limply, a shining pool below him showing how lately he had become mutton. Acland shuddered, recalling eaten chops. The one grocer sold many things, but principally whisky; the other windows had glass jars of cheap sweets, matches, soap, and herrings piled dustily.

They slid through the uneven street, and then climbed up, the road winding along the side of a lowering hill; gorse — a fox covert, Sandy was informed — on its summit, coarse grass on its unfenced sides. As they drove Standish told him

about the Hartlands. Step-sisters, one twenty years older than the other, but deeply attached, living at Castleknock without a penny between them, muddling from year to year no one knew how. Then puffing his great pipe, Standish lapsed into moody silence, sometimes raising his head as an animal which scents prey to point out a fence he had jumped, a line the hounds had run.

He pulled up the bay horse, looking down at a thatched cottage nestling in a dip below them.

"Michael Malone's mother died yesterday," he said. "I must run down; he stops a lot of the country for me."

So they bumped along a narrow lane, with thorns reaching grasping fingers from either side, and steep banks scraping the car, to the door of a comfortable cottage; a great manure heap close to the front door, fowl disporting themselves everywhere, and a big pig grunting in the sunshine. Michael Malone, clearly pleased to see them, came out, his easy grin striking no note of bereavement; old women passed in and out, their faces full of happy interest. Standish got off the car and went in, talking casually. From the inside of the house came a shriller note of welcome. "An' she makes the fine corpse, yer honour . . . poor mamma."

Acland gripped the reins loosely, wondering if three days before he had really walked on the hot pavements in London and believed it to be the world. The two men returned, Malone walking round to Acland.

"If yer honour would care to sthep in an' see her, an' have a taste of whisky with Misther Blundell."

Horried refusal was checked by a quick whisper from Standish.

"He must go; it would give offence if he did not." So Acland, his spine crisping chilly, fell over the pig and followed.

The kitchen was very tidy, with gleam of polished brass and china from the high, wooden dresser; the old women whispered over a turf fire. Plates of biscuits and a seed-cake were on the square table flanked by decanters of whisky and thick tumblers.

Michael Malone's sister arose, curtseying, bidding the stranger welcome. "Wouldn't he take a look at mamma? The sweetest corpse he ever saw, for all she suffered, bawling to the ind . . ." Here Miss Malone wept. "'Twas the blow the jinnit dealt her, whin he fell with the cart goin' to Mass, an' her new puce dhress on an' all."

Through the open door they could see the four-post bed, the waxen-faced dead woman, tall candles burning at her head. Acland was pushed on. The air of the room smelt damply close, the big bed almost filling the whole space. The woman was laid high; a crucifix in her folded hands, a cruel black mark on her forehead. The whitewashed walls were hung with gaudy, crude pictures of saints. "Poor mamma! an' she with twenty chickens fat for Wednesday's market," said her daughter sadly.

Something brushed Acland's heels. A white duck, quacking uneasily, looked up at the bed with bright, uncomprehending eyes.

"Mamma's pet. The leg was broke on it, and she minded it. 'Twas like a Christian to her, slleepin' in that basket. 'Tis callin' her all day."

Unconsciously, Miss Malone struck tragedy.

Acland backed out silently, leaving Standish to speak. Malone had filled a brimming bumper and would take no denial. Standish said he'd take his

outside, but Acland drank meekly ; cheap, fiery stuff, which made him gulp as it bit his throat.

He ate a biscuit, though it seemed indecent to eat there in view of that waxen watcher, with the duck quacking plaintively. Malone said proudly that doubtless they didn't get much whisky in England.

"Washy beer an' clart ; things ye'd be at all day an' slleep sober. That touched ye, sir."

"It did," said Acland, abandoning the smear of sweetened plaster on his biscuit.

"That's the sthuff," said Malone proudly. "Ye're a quare lot there, I'm thinkin', sir."

Acland meant to reply, but the fiery spirit rushed straight to his head. He went out dizzily, omitting to defend his country.

"Vitriol," he gasped, as they drove off, brushing fresh arrivals. "How could you take me in, Standish ? Vitriol !"

Standish explained that good whisky would give no pleasure. "I thought you'd take the hint to spill it outside," he said ; "but instead you took the jorum Faith, Sandy, I believe you're drunk."

Sandy was not at all sure that he was not. His head throbbed : the landscape was blurred, and when he contradicted Standish, he did it with a very careful and disobedient tongue.

"You've got half an hour to get sober in," said Standish, unheeding petulant protestation.

They wheeled to the left, dipping downwards under big trees, arching across the road, and in at Castleknock. A hospitable structure, standing permanently open on broken hinges, wooden bars a few yards further up keeping the cattle in.

Castleknock was a rambling house, evidently designed by the same architect as Ballymacshane.

The same flight of stone steps, the same descent to basement; bareness of white plaster and many windows, some of them blind. There is a falseness about blind windows. One thinks of sullen, house-bound ghosts putting aside the walls and peering out spitefully. Neglected flowers blossomed on the narrow lawn; unpruned roses, tangle of old carnations, self-sown mignonette, poppies, blaze of crawling nasturtiums. To the left, on an old croquet ground, was the scar of horses lately rung.

Acland looked round curiously. He heard a shout of welcome, a gust of voices sweeping from the house, when something white fluttered across his nose, and the bay horse plunged snorting away. Acland, just preparing to get down, did so over-hurriedly, sprawling upon hands and knees at a woman's feet.

"An' the wind to whip me cap from me," came in shrill staccato from above.

"I never saw such a chap to fall off cars," said Standish, returning quite undisturbed from a plunging circuit of the flower-beds. "Mary Kate"—this to the repentant damsel who came for her cap—"have you no hat-pins?"

Mary Kate, as she nailed the grimy cap to her hair, averred that she had one, but the wind whipped it out.

Acland got up slowly: even the Downs were preferable to Standish's driving animals. He saw Evie smiling at him; her sister, laughing openly, a slender, grey-eyed woman, defying her forty odd years with Irish recklessness, and behind them a tall, slight man of about forty-five, with a lined face, very jetty black hair, and a supercilious expression.

"That's Sandy, Nora," said Standish. "He wasn't long going on his knees to you," this with melancholy humour. "But I think 'twas Michael Malone's whisky that sent him there. Are you sober yet, Sandy?"

"Sober yet? There are limits to the bounds of patience."

The little man spluttered like an over-boiling kettle, denying the idea. He, Alexander Acland, business man, to be accused of drunkenness on a blazing summer afternoon, as he came to call upon two ladies. He certainly had taken a little whisky, but—

"Oh, a cup of tea will set you right," said Nora sympathetically, quite accepting Standish's view. "Standish might have warned you."

"Didn't I tip him the wink to come out," said Standish, grinning sadly. "He coughed as if you'd hit him on the throat, and Michael pitying him for a poor Englishman."

Standish then departed with the bay, recounting the happy tale of its burning as he went, and Acland buzzed in futile misery.

"If you would kindly understand"—he grew incoherent as he mounted the steps—"that I—I was never such a—in such a state. I should not dream of it. The horse swerved aside just as I was removing the rug, and I am not accustomed to outside jaunting-cars. It is most unfair. Perhaps next," wailed Sandy, sitting down, overcame, upon a hall chair, "he'll say that I was drunk when I fell into the barberry bush after luncheon."

"He—might," said Miss Hartland thoughtfully, biting at a rose-stem with her white teeth. "He might. Oh, look here!" she added. "I hope that's

not the chair I left my cast on. I was fishing this morning."

The bound with which Acland rose disturbed his furious protest.

He entered the long, cool drawing-room sulkily, thirsting for revenge upon the melancholy Standish. Tea was ready, laid on a big table. Piles of small, rosy strawberries and golden, old-fashioned raspberries; jugs of rich cream; sugar and cream in quaint old silver; tea in plain brown earthenware, and tasting as it never does in anything else. The tall man, who came in silently, still stared at Acland with unpleasant thoughtfulness.

"Oh, you; do you know each other? Sir Edmund Graves, Mr. Acland," said Evie Hartland carelessly.

Her step-sister flung her a quick look, for Acland turned crimson, a sudden flood rushing to the roots of his sandy hair. Sir Edmund did not change colour, he had known, but he bowed very coldly biting his lips under his clipped moustache.

Acland sat silent, forgetting his good manners. This was the man Kathleen had run away from who had pursued her unmercifully, combined with her parents, until she had fled, bright-faced, brave-hearted, to the cruel arms of the great city, and there *starved*. With the pang of regret which never left him, he recalled her white, transparent skin; the big, blue eyes which had smiled to the end; and Grattan standing by her as she slept and died.

"Starved to death. Alex. . . . You can call it any name you like. But it's that. No nourishment; too late now. Couldn't you look at her, man, and see?"

It might not have been altogether Graves' fault, but

an unreasoning hatred of the thin, sneering face, with its narrow forehead and selfish mouth, sprang to life in the little Englishman's heart. He, too, bowed stiffly, oblivious of the fact that it was quite two minutes since they had been introduced, and Graves', turning, sat down by Evie. He did not seem to be over, welcome but he sat on, laughing and talking, using foolish compliments to delight foolish youth, and finally carrying her off to the garden. They passed the windows, the girl bareheaded, the strong light finding no flaw in her fine skin—the man bending over her. A flutter stirred Acland's heart. She was so pretty, far too much so for this man with the dyed hair. He mashed strawberries upon old china, and sat eating and talking, when a thundering ring aroused them. It was followed by the opening of the door and audible announcements from Mary Kate that Miss Hartland was not in. Gone out for the day . . . 'Twas no use waitin'.

Miss Hartland looked uneasy, and slipped to the drawing-room door just as the outer one went to with a bang.

"Who, Mary Kate?" she whispered, a note of alarm in her voice

"A young man from O'Neill's, miss, with a note. Knowing you wouldn't be in to him, I said so, and down he sat on the stheps sayin' he'll wait. If ye'd go out the back way, miss."

Nora Hartland coloured. In tones which the young man on the door-step must have heard she spoke to Standish.

"Hear that?" she cried. "I thought it might be . . . the other. . . . I've bought oats and bran and meat from the brute for twenty years, and

now he threatens to writ me for a miserable forty pounds. This man Martin has put them up to it. I'll give them all something after the show; but . . ." She swung out with uplifted head, Standish observing gloomily to Sandy that 'twas very hard work to make two ends meet when one of them was a foot too short.

Five minutes later a young man (who looked as though he had been whipped) and Miss Hartland walked together to the flower-plots talking amicably. Having pulled him some roses and sent him to the garden to eat fruit, she returned, flushed, with triumph to announce O'Neill's nephew was now a crushed mouse.

"Daring to press me," she said royally, "when he knows he'll get a tenner in September."

He business man sat horrified by it all. The complete absence of any shame or desire to hide difficulties was very new to him.

"But," he said unhappily, "why not have paid him?"

Miss Hartland intimated with brevity that she was totally unable to. The soul of a man who had never owed a penny was stricken.

"Forgive me," he said. "But then, why keep horses?"

Nora stared at him blankly.

"How *on* earth could I hunt without them?" she queried, with simple directness.

The discordant bray of Standish's sudden laugh rest the air.

"D'ye think she could walk with hounds?" he said contemptuously.

A flood of wise axioms were dammed by a bar of sheer astonishment. Sandy Acland took a

spoonful of strawberries and gave up trying to understand the Irish race. One might wrestle with duns upon a door-step, but man must hunt or die.

"In England," he remarked, after a pause, "we look upon horses as most expensive things too keep."

"In Ireland," said Miss Hartland, "they keep us. They float my nose above the flood. I've never yet had my head up."

"Dear me!" said Acland, looking at the array of cakes and the great jugs full of cream.

"Oh, the cows give the cream," said Nora easily, answering his unspoken argument. "The silver is Evie's."

They went out then, Acland still deep in that puzzle of Ireland which has baffled great statesmen, and will baffle them, for men cannot reason with a race of children.

Nora and Standish, oblivious of his company, fell deep into the discussion of a certain writ: the bitter wickedness of the shopman who refused to wait for his money. Also, the extreme graveness of the danger, owing to the presence in the stable of the chestnut colt which might be seized for the debt. The harness and the cows were away and safe; Mikey Carty was supposed to rent the fields. Acland listened with a vague feeling of irritation.

The disgrace they ought to have felt, the grief of having used goods which could not be paid for, was completely absent. He knew nothing of the strong old feudal instinct which reasoned that it was honour for the tradesman to be dealt with, and the settlement could await the pleasure of the lords of the soil.

So talking, they went up a narrow walk and under an arched doorway into a tangle of bygone days. Flowers and fruit running riotously unkempt, gnarled apple trees, strawberries long past work, perennials struggling through a mass of weeds; here a flare of red-hot poker or flimsy mass of Michaelmas daisy; rotting frames and skeleton greenhouses—a wreck of what man had planned. Nora, used to it, saw little wrong; the stable-boys worked in it in the summer, otherwise it stood idle. They dived under boughs and brushed through tangles of gooseberries until they reached a huge square of raspberries, where the young man from O'Neill's, now amber-smeared, was stuffing happily.

He grinned sheepishly at Nora, full of apology for the note he had brought with him.

"'Tis Martin sphurred me uncle on," he said confidentially. "He's huntin' thim all, miss; soon sorra a one will buy a thing but they musht pay on the nail. Didn't he seize the widdy Cassidy's cow lasht week, and had her home, but the widdy paid. 'Tis the talk of the town, miss, that ye had some words with him, an' he says he'll besht ye yet. Indade, 'twas ye're goin' on to him made me uncle bittier. In truth, miss, I heard as I come out . . ." O'Neill's nephew peered cautiously round, sidling nearer among the raspberry canes, then, as he looked this way and that for imaginary listeners, his mouth fell open, he froze to a rapt horror, a fat yellow raspberry half-way to his mouth. "Jakus!" he muttered, "'Twas the truth!"

Between the tangle of boughs and riot of bushes they could see two men coming in at the arched doorway, attended by Mary Kate, who insistently but inconsistently assured them that the missus was

out for the day to Dublin, gone to the river to fish—all in loud and miserable tones.

"The bailiff's, miss," hissed O'Neill's nephew dramatically. "The new divil an' all."

The pretty colour fled from Nora's cheeks; she sprang swiftly aside, drawing them to the shelter of an old arbour, now a mere tangle of honeysuckle.

"The chestnut's in the stable," she groaned. "Oh, Standish! They mustn't get him. I never thought they would dare. Someone must run him away. They may have men watching. Someone ride him off. Not you, Standish. They wouldn't believe you, but. . . ." She swung upon Acland, clasping her hands about his arm. "You!"

The bailiff's, had paused looking about them.

"*You!*" whispered Nora, crouching close. "You run. Out the back door. Get him on, say he's yours."

"But I—I . . ."

The mild and law-abiding Englishman had no chance. He found himself protesting feebly, swept away on a torrent of words. It bore upon his swimming brain that he was to fly like the winds—run as a hare—by currant bushes, at the back of a beech hedge, through a plantation, over a sunk fence to the stable; was to bid one James to clap a saddle swiftly on an unknown chestnut, and having got himself on to the saddle, was to ride it away swearing it was his own.

Breaking the law, telling lies, who cared for these things when a chestnut four-year-old, and it to win in his class at the horse show, was in question. The bailiffs, papers in their hands, came nearer.

"Arra, come on; don't be slheepin!" O'Neill's nephew plucked his sleeve, sweeping him round.

Alexander Acland of London, until a month ago a creature of the mildest routine, found himself sprinting, bent double past the currant bushes, dashing erect, hedge-hidden, across a square of cabbage, where green things rolled, snapping rottenly beneath his feet; scratched by thorns, slapped by boughs, never given a moment. Out a low doorway, plunging into the mazes of a larch plantation where the light tassels whipped him, smelling pungently, and ever urged to "Hurry, let ye hurry. 'Tis crawlin' ye are. Come on."

The difficulties of the sunk fence yawned at his feet, but almost ere he paused, he was tweaked forward to an irresistible jump, to land amid a grove of well-grown nettles.

"Did ye sthumble?" said O'Neill's nephew, observing the little man flat on his face. "Hurry on, I tell ye; hurry on."

Breath was a mere memory to Acland as he turned in at the stable gate, but O'Neill's nephew, speeding ahead, screamed loudly for James. Then came mad exclamations from that henchman, part of this daylight nightmare. "Divil swcheeps!" and "Be damns!" A frantic diving into hay-lofts, the emerging of O'Neill's nephew with a bridle, and the leading forth of a great, lumping chestnut, with tucked-down tail and laid-back ears.

Horror of law-breaking tingled in the panting little man's heart, and, to do him justice, rose high above the fear which gripped him, as he saw this red equine mountain, and knew he must clamber to its back. "They may not come here. There may be no need," he commenced to falter, temporising, as he endeavoured to refasten his collar. To this O'Neill's nephew scathingly replied that maybe he mightn't

die when the breath left him, and also revealed the inborn criminal instinct by dashing water over the chestnut's legs and then bestrewing them with handfuls of dust.

"They'll be sure to come in," he panted, "knowin' the lady could niver give up this horse."

Nemesis grasped Sandy's leg; he lighted on his stomach upon a slippery saddle, dived for the over-long stirrup, gripped the reins and sat up, a miserable man. He was sitting there, still undecided, when Miss Hartland, Standish, and the bailiffs walked in at the gate. Nora's cheeks were poppy-coloured, her head was high; Standish slouched along looking slightly more cheerful than usual. A frantic leg and flapping coat-tail represented the headlong flight of O'Neill's nephew, who, not wishing to be reported to his uncle, took covert in the hay-loft.

"Not gone yet?" said Nora, in her clear, sweet voice.

"I was delayed," said Acland, taking the cue. "In fact . . . I . . . fell . . . among some bushes."

It was cruel of Standish to mutter: "Drunk again!" as the little man made this gallant attempt to explain away a flapping collar and scarlet cheeks, but it may have been for the benefit of the bailiff.

"Go down the back avenue," said Standish, with meaning, "and turn to the left, the way you rode over. I'll overtake you."

To move on anywhere meant that James would let the reins go, and Acland would be at the mercy of the fidgeting brute between his knees, already contemplating buck jumps.

"Lead him," he whispered softly in James's ears.

But the new bailiff shook his head. He had peered about the empty yard and knew there was nothing in it. He had come with express orders to seize a

chestnut horse until the bill was paid, and he raised a fretted face. This animal was a chestnut. He made some nasty remarks about the unaccountable bareness of the stables, then strode across.

"Ye have a red horse that should pay us," he said. "This horse is of that colour."

Nora shivered, seeing Sandy quail. Would he yield to the law or lie for her as a true gentleman?

James jogged Acland's heel. Looking down, he saw the hard, goatee-bearded face of an Irishman who has lost his best nature in America, who had returned to do business, with all his own nation's cunning to aid him. The spoilt product of two countries put a hand on the horse's bridle and sneered openly.

"This might be he," said Haynes, the bailiff, sharply.

"How dare you touch my horse, sir?" flared Acland superbly. Nora's face brightening. "I am Mr. Acland of London," he added pompously, "and have been calling on Miss Hartland, I am now leaving."

"Ridin' back to London maybe?" queried the man cunningly.

He was aware that the chestnut colt had come in from grass, and though he could not swear to it himself, Martin, his cousin and employer, who had promised to follow him, knew it well. So he hesitated to gain time, knowing that the law which he served could be nasty to those who violated the rights of ownership.

"Isn't that Miss Hartland's red colt they have ye thrown up on?" he asked sullenly. "Divil a sthep ye'll lave the yard till I know, or one comes that knows. Mистер Martin's on his way here."

Nora started. Here was fresh danger. Martin knew the horse well. Acland caught Nora's eye, and instantly found himself lying with a fluency which astonished his own ears. He demanded right to go home; he stormed at the bailiff, but the man hesitated, still holding the rein. It was a fairly well-known fact, that if any of Miss Hartland's creditors did turn nasty, her neighbours immediately took all her stock and swore to their being their own.

The distant rattle of a trap smote on their ears. Standish came up to Acland, and, under cover of adjusting a stirrup leather, urged him to leave.

The Irish-American held his ground stubbornly. The dominant Saxon strain broke loose in Sandy.

"Let go my horse, you man!" he shouted savagely, but Hayes, listening for the approaching trap, bade him be still.

"Ye won't go so aisy, sir," he sneered.

Acland sat straight. A light of martyrdom shone on his nettle-stung face. He would go. He would be *gone* before this new-comer arrived.

"Then I will go unaisy!" he thundered, with unexpected retort. "Let go the horse, James."

James did so promptly, moreover, aided by a hoarse whisper from Standish, he raised his foot and kicked the chestnut hard upon the ribs. At the same moment a handful of old iron, deftly aimed, fell in strange hail from the door of the loft upon the shining quarters.

The chestnut colt, nervous and half-trained, asked for no more. He rose with a soaring plunge from the kick, dashed forward at the stinging blows; laid the bailiff flat upon the yard; cleared him as he lay howling; spurned the world with ready heels, and bolted for his pastures, while flat upon his mane

terrified yet triumphant, crouched Alexander Acland, finding breath for a faint "Hang you! Lie there," as he jumped the bailiff. The two disappeared at fast gallop down the back avenue.

"It's the devil's long way to fall," observed Standish easily, as he ran for his bay horse, adding that an action for damages would be immediately instituted by Mr. Acland if he happened to be found dead.

The bay, always ready to go home, tore off cantering, James hopping on the step and shouting comment—mixed with unheard directions.

"He's off. Begob! he's there yet. Gather up the reins, can't ye, and sthoph him. Gripes, but the grey filly has him losht! Here she comes helther-skelther. He's off. No; he's out the gate. Bad cess to the grey filly, Misther Standish, if she isn't over the bound fince and down to meet thim on the road. That'll finish it."

It was certainly the grey filly who finished matters. Acland had held on despairingly, all but gone, when the grey filly, all mane and tail, and whinny, tore up, and the chestnut swerved. He recovered, for the chestnut, naturally gentle, sobered to a shattering trot, and was contemplating stopping when the filly came again, snorting friendship loudly. The chestnut plunged, and stopped dead short, giving a ringing greeting; while Acland shot out over his shoulder into the depths of a fortunately muddy ditch.

"God be praised we had the rain," breathed James, as he pulled the Englishman out. "Were the ditch dhry ye were cracked to bits with the shoot ye took. God save ye, with no knowledge of horse-riding, to mount as ye did. God help us!"

He departed for wisps of grass, while Standish

eyed his guest with silent thoughtfulness. Sandy was plastered with mud ; he limped when he moved ; he bled freely from a cut over the eye. A little blood and mud make a great show. A sudden flash of tragic joy lit Blundell's face.

"Clap the chestnut into Dayly's," he commanded, "and come on, Sandy, before you're dry. Let the blood run. We'll teach this chap a lesson."

He shoved the astonished little man on to the car, talking earnestly as he did so, until a faint smile showed under a mask of red-hued mud.

Miss Hartland, thoughtfully nibbling a twig, was listening to the combined threats of the bailiff and Martin, her creditor, when the car returned. Then she screamed, genuinely frightened. Standish told James to pull up ; with a gentle hand he plucked Acland, very limp and bloody, from the seat, and standing with an arm about the injured man, commenced to hold forth. Nora had fled for female aid.

"A hundred pounds," said Blundell slowly, while James now supported Acland at the other side, "won't settle this. That's for damages, let alone the horse and the probable death. Nothing less, before Judge Maguire. A gentleman, calling on a lady, is forcibly held ; his valuable horse struck and made to bolt, the horse ruined, the gentleman—" he looked down at Sandy, who quivered — "the gentleman. Mary Kate," he cried, "bring the brandy before it's too late. It was nice doings on," said Standish, as he propped Sandy up. "Judge Maguire would made short work of men who held horses and then struck them," and he proceeded to tell the whole story from his point of view.

Martin wheeled upon his cousin and bailiff, who

with the fervour of truth, denied everything, and poured out his story, to be contradicted by Standish and snapped at by James until the fabric of his tale was a mere fretted rag. Aghast, he swore he had never struck the horse, which suddenly appeared to go mad . . . and ran away.

"There are those who will swear he was struck," said Standish heavily. "I saw him spring from the blow."

"An' meself," piped a voice from the hay-loft. "He was sthruck under the right axther. I'll swear to it."

Sudden witnesses dropping from heaven, the bailiff lost heart and colour; he commenced to contradict himself, and not to feel sure of his own existence. He sat down heavily on the edge of the pump-trough and wished he had never been born. Nora, attended by a grey-haired cook and Mary Kate, came flying out with towels, a basin, and whisky. Acland, prompted by Standish, wagged his head and looked very ill indeed. Nora cried out, the maids screamed, Tom groaned, Evie and Sir Edmund coming in the gate, both joined in, the clamour rose like a flood-tide.

Standish measured out whisky. "Don't wash him," he whispered to Nora, who, catching his eye, suddenly dropped her sponge and buried her face in her handkerchief.

Standish observed, as he ordered Acland not to drink, that he had sent for a doctor and a vet. That the strange horse, worth two hundred pounds, had his hocks cut and back tendons hanging, and that Mr. Acland, possessing a weak heart, was almost sure to die.

At this point, Sir Edmund caused a diversion by

shoving Evie out of the yard, and the word "drunk" wafted down the breeze.

Acland stirred, forgetting his weakness, the mud covering his sudden flush.

"Die! Make him swallow, James," said Standish solemnly. "The whisky's going to loss," he added to himself.

Martin muttering, knew himself a beaten man. The clamour frightened him. His ally, the bailiff, was a broken reed, crumpled up in a pump-trough. Ill-temperedly, he swore he'd fight: he darkly hinted at swindling; but Acland suddenly allowed his head to droop over his left shoulder, and swaying, closed his eyes. The cook, with a neigh of terror, dropped the basin on Mary Kate's toes and commenced to pray. Mary Kate, much injured, wept aloud; and Clancy's nephew screeched "Glory!" from the hay-loft. The bailiff, feeling the edge of the pump-trough, did not express his collapse, slipped over it and sat in a pool of water.

"My God!" said Standish. "He's nearly gone."

Martin stormed feebly. Mountainous damages loomed before his eyes. He kicked the supine bailiff, and proffered compromise, while the cook prayed through it all.

What Acland said when Standish whispered to him, was: "For God's sake stop the cook!" but Standish translated it otherwise. Very gravely he observed that Mr. Acland wished to be hard on no man. He would probably die, but if Miss Hartland's bill was receipted, he would forgive all and forego the heavy claims he might exact.

None knew better than Martin that half his account was fraudulent. Never was bill more quickly

receipted, or stamp more fervently licked. He thought he had escaped cheaply. He reft the damp bailiff from the trough and drove him away. It was subsequently reported that both men had black eyes on arriving at Lisduff.

O'Neill's nephew dashed down to shut the gates, and Miss Hartland subsided, in her turn, on the pump-trough, as Acland stood up smiling and demanded a drink. He was exceedingly triumphant. The cook feeling that good religion had been wasted, retreated sulkily, bewailing the loss of her basin. "Not another left to raise bread in," she grunted savagely.

"Go and wash yourself, Sandy," said Standish, sadly and ungratefully, "and don't drink any more. There are worse than you on earth."

Here Sir Edmund, who had kept Evie away, came across.

"Why don't you put the chap to bed!" he asked disgustedly, unaware of what had happened.

This was too much. Acland faced the tall man, asking in a very sober voice if Sir Edmund believed him drunk.

"Oh, no! merely indisposed," said the baronet drily, as he lighted a cigarette.

His look held mud, blood, and torn garments up to review.

"It's very sad," said Standish severely. "Poor man!" Then his sudden bray of laughter reft the air. "Be Gad, Sandy!" he said, "you never knew what life was till you came to Ireland."

Acland muttered, devoid of repartee; but hatred of the black-haired man lit his eyes.

Nora jumped up.

"Sandy has been a treasure," she flashed out

"Why, even Standish couldn't have lied more perfectly."

"You're out of that hunt, Ned," said Standish, as Acland was led away between the two ladies, and he proceeded to tell the tale, interrupting it now and again with the gusts of merriment which seemed to positively reeve his sad face.

They left later, loaded with applause, Acland ruminating on his day's doings. The sun was sinking through tinged clouds; purple and grey, edged with gentle rose. Higher up, dark bars floated in an amber sky.

Acland was tired; the flutter at his side reminded him of his reason for coming over. They dropped from the radiance of the dying sun into the shadow of the hills, and ever by his side ran another shadow grim and dark—the shadow of death, into which all men must step. He had acted and laughed during the afternoon; but it sat beside him now. If this cure should fail . . . if he should grow worse instead of better . . . then he had but a year of life. Within twelve months . . . perhaps less, must come that inevitable ending, which is anticipated with bitter terror, met bravely at the last. His heart fluttered, his cheeks grew whiter, his hands numb.

Struggling to forget he raised his head as they drove up the long hill near Ballymacshane, and peevishly asked Standish if there was no such thing as law and order in Ireland.

"The law of self-protection." Standish looked round at the note in the tired voice. "Come now, Sandy, did you ever enjoy anything more in your life than worsting that cur? He did it for a piece of spite, for he knew poor Nora would pay if she could, as she always does."

Acland shook his red head, pondering on the waste of time which English statesmen endure as they endeavour to govern Ireland. The now amiable bay came smartly up to the door; Aunt Susie was out on the lawn bewailing a dead chicken. She held the limp little thing in her hands. It was there again, the shadow of death. Acland tried to get down, but the world span dizzily and sank beneath his feet.

Standish ran to him. "Here, Aunt Susie," he cried. "Leave the hens. Sandy's fainting. Hi there, Mary Anne! call Phillips. We forget he said as he held his little guest in his strong arms with a woman's gentleness, that he is really ill. To-day was too much for him. Hang it!" he added, as he gave Sandy to Phillips and ran for brandy "Fancy, if it really did for him, and we'd let Martin off like that."

Acland endured an evening of semi-invalidism and decided as he sat in the big arm-chair that it would be worth his while to add notes on Ireland to the diary which he always kept. In time to come the shadow had fled from the turf fire's glow . . . he might compile a most interesting book from his personal experiences. It is satisfactory to note that on the sale of the good chestnut, Miss Hartland paid the man Martin all that she believed she owed him. He left Lisduff that winter; for the story leaked out, and the town laughed the hard man from his place.

CHAPTER VII

TELLING OF THE WILD WEST COAST

"But the red sun sank to his evening shroud
Where the Western billows are rolled,
Behind a curtain of sable cloud,
With a tinge of scarlet and gold."

—GORDON.

ACLAND felt better again next day, and wandered out into the yard to peer in at Holy Robin, for the colt had caught his eye.

"If I could ride," he said—Phillips hovered near with an unwelcome milk and soda—"I should like that animal."

Tom, thinking of those doubtful hocks, turned Holy Robin round.

"He might carry you well," he said, "whin he's thrained; for he comes off gintle sthock. An' ye'd have a beauty."

Phillips proffered the milk and soda with respectful decision, Robin poking out a velvety nose to see if it was good.

"Whin ye come back," said Tom, "I'll have a saint med of him."

"Come back?" queried Acland, startled.

Phillips explained. He had understood that his master knew all about it. The whole family moved to the sea. To Dunhaven, on the west coast. In fact,

the old ladies were already packing. Acland, who wanted nothing better than the quiet of Ballymacshane shook his head and went to Standish. He found that gentleman inspecting fat pigs and received information of the news.

"Oh, yes; they are all off to Dunhaven; Nora and Evie and all. Just the place for an invalid."

Sandy's faint had impressed Standish. In fact, Dunhaven seemed a museum of delights, comprising boating, fishing, bathing, shrimping, and all kinds of things which might appeal to a non-sporting man in doubtful health: the next place being America if he fell over the cliffs.

Resistance was impossible. He had to go. The house buzzed for a few days, until he found himself back at Cara Station, transported thither behind a pair of reliable plough horses, with a packing of baskets containing kittens, and other baskets containing chickens. Acland took a second-class ticket, but was thrust in first, with a careless assurance from Standish that the gentleman would pay the difference when the collector came. He responded to the lecture from Sandy occasioned by the disbursement of this extra money by saying that economy was waste of time.

It was a journey of many changes, one at Tullow, one again an hour later at Ennis, and then, crowded into tiny carriages, they all gathered for lunch—a closely-packed collection. A stroll along the platform had revealed Phillips, instead of using his second-class ticket, travelling third with the maids; his smile was uneasy when his master congratulated him on economy.

They lunched merrily, with the interlude of an escaped kitten and flock of fluffy nurslings falling

upon Graves lap, as their tiny train ran into a wild and desolate land. Crops of stones instead of grass ; loose stone walls fencing the poor fields ; glimpses of deep, wet glens and narrow streams, until the land grew lonelier, stretching at either side in a brown-hued, dark-pooled bog.

They stopped at a little busy station, a river foaming close to it, to see the sea before them. A great sheen of shimmering grey, Moher cliffs barring the horizon, foam licking their dark feet. Sea such as England knows not : no glimpses of piers and band-stand, no gentle waves coming and going decorously, but this great waste of untamed waters, glorious in its majesty, heaving its might into huge rollers, coming spuming at the jagged cliffs which breasted and defied it ; thundering on the wide bays, leaping at the rocks, a beast wild and unsubdued, ever ready to leap into wrath.

Acland, a little jaded, peered out, saw the glimmer of grey waters, and hoped there would not be too much noise. He remarked that he detested the constant playing of music and subsequent demands for money.

Standish's laugh jarred their nerves ; Miss Susie pointed gently across a stretch of boggy land to the sea. "Nothing but rocks and sand," she said, as they ran between high banks, foxgloves clinging to the moist sides. Further enlightenment was cut short by their arrival. There *is* a porter at Dunhaven Station, his name is Michael, and he figures in a well-known song, but he is generally wanted to mend the engine. When there is no train he has been known to attend to passengers. He was certainly not to be found now. Standish went to the van, which was empty, for the guard was also wrestling with machinery, and commenced to pull out things. Phillips, finding

himself worsted in the encounter with several dozen old women, suddenly remembered that he could not find his master's dressing-case, and searched all the carriages for it; while Graves and Standish, attended by a car-driver, found the piles of luggage—and Standish, as he saw Phillips finally pick up the dressing-case from the platform, said drily that he was a man of resource. "Certainly, sir!" said Phillips modestly, carefully wrapping a rug round his master.

It was needed. Late July as it was, the wind cut chilly. It rushed across the flat bogland straight from romping with that giant sea. It whooped at them on the narrow road, and blew fine sand to them grittily as they passed the humping coarse-grassed sandhills. No fear of music here, nothing but a few bleak little houses crouching on the edge of the cliff, all well apart, like sulky children. Bare little places; fenced about with whitewashed, flat-topped walls; the wind thrashing them hourly. Nothing to hear but the crash and roll of the breakers, grinding against the granite cliffs.

Desolation impersonified, yet splendid in its loneliness; a mighty sea god, brooding alone.

They wheeled off the road into a little bumping lane, the sea crashing in front, an ugly two-storied house at their left.

On Standish jogging his arm and asking what he thought of Dunhaven, Acland shook his head. He looked at the bare fields, the lonely roads, the waste of heaving waters, and suggested that the Creator must have had a little piece of the world over, and dumped it down here as an afterthought, for He couldn't have intended to make such a place. Further speech was cut short by the catching of the step in the iron gate, and the interesting argument between

Standish and the driver as to whose fault it was, the gate's or the driver's, all possibility of getting off being deferred until they were clear of the rusty iron spikes.

"Bedam to it for a gate! me sthep's desthryed," said Patsy, taking the last word, as they got clear, and drove along a rutty, grass-grown track.

Memories of the Croxton cottage troubled Acland. He came into a tiny room, bleak and bare as the sea it overlooked; with a permanent gale whining through the narrow windows, both propped up with sea stones. Miss Susie said it looked even worse than last year, and immediately enlisted Patsy to feed her chickens with oatmeal.

The place reeked of sea-damp; it smelt musty; but no one seemed astonished at the bare wretchedness. The first alluring feature was the arrival of Phillips and Ellie with a bundle of wood which the maid called "bog dale." This bogwood flared to match's touch, and after a flood of smoke, which Ellie pronounced due to "thim divils of Daa's in the chimbley," there was a fire such as only turf and wood can supply, glowing and fragrant, cheerful, yet not fierce.

Ellie announced that Mrs. Magee, who was Patsy's mother, had the "kittle biled against thim, and a loaf in the oven that would be in in two minutes." She then retired, attended by Phillips, who was neglecting his own work.

To sit down in the drawing-room at Seaview Lodge, Dunhaven, is a difficulty. It is furnished with wickers chairs from caravans, clearly meant for the day when a month-old baby shall have learnt the art of sitting up. It is further embellished with a broken ottoman, a round table, and an unsafe sofa

The Blundells brought a collection of deck-chairs, but people who do not, suffer, as many could say. Tea came on a rusty tray piled with small, thick cups ; but it was Acland's first meeting with a hot soda loaf fresh from a turf oven. They ate this and much plum-cake, and Acland, cheered, was ordered to go with Standish to the shore, for the sea is a monarch, requiring immediate attendance at its court. It licked the low cliffs a hundred yards from the house. A waste of wind-whipped waters, now slipping backwards from the shore, leaving the rocks uncovered, sucking, roaring, snarling ; crash of heavy rollers ; plop of little wavelets.

A pallid gleam of gold showed Moher cliffs and the distant Arran islands. The light was soon covered ; the sea ran leaden against a stormy sky. Grey clouds massed heavily, torn into jagged, humping crags, dark before a furtive crimson. Looking out at the sweep of the sandy bay, the ochre-hued hills behind, it was hard to realise why mankind had chosen Dunhaven as a health resort and built those lonely houses. Five of them faced the bay, forlornly breasting the eternal wind. It all belongs there to one landlady, an old woman who queens it over her tiny slice of earth, and considers the cold comforts of fifty years before good enough for those she condescends to let lodges to.

"We'll have rain," said Standish, going down a steep groove on to the the wet seaweed. "See how clear the isles are. It's coming now."

The purple rack of cloud crept higher, eating the gleams of sunlight in its greedy mouth. The wide bay is rock-hemmed, with creamy fretted froth at either side, noising up and down like some striving, restless beast, for it is not often calm at Dunhaven.

There are days of glaring heat with blue waters reflecting a blue sky, when the rocks shimmer, and the glare is hard to bear; but the spirit of the Atlantic heaves below the surface . . . the west wind whispers it comes again to riot with its mighty love.

The tide fell slowly, as though unwilling to leave the cliff. Patsy, the driver, who was also a boatman, came down to move up his light canoe, and to say, "There'd be a hardenin' in the wind afore mornin'."

Standish followed the grumbling waves; small things now in the long reefs of rocks; the whole air teemed with salt.

"'Twill blow strength into you, Sandy," he said gloomily, flinging stones for the barking terriers.

Catty, the red setter, who had adopted Acland, thrust a moist nose into his hand and said mutely that she, too, would rather be at home.

They left the shore, wandering along the cliff-edge. It was wilder this way; no houses, nothing but small creeks, water-worn boulders, deep, dark pools with tangle of weed in their depths. Sheep cropped the short, sweet grass. Further, there was a stretch of flat rocks, wet still, the sea breaking greenly at the edge of the reef. Lifeless; no boats on the waters; no one on the rocks. Here the sea is a conqueror, not a serf. One dreamt of the towering Spanish ships, driven here; laden with pride of Spanish wealth and blood; to grind to powder on that relentless shore. Lifted on huge rollers; beaten down by spuming waves; broken and torn by jagged granite teeth. Dark corpses strewn with the sea-wrack on the shore. They who had sailed in their might to conquer the little land of England, were mere toys in the hand of England's

guardian, flung against the shores of her sister Isle. Acland was oppressed by it all; he was glad to go home and see the fire-lit sitting-room. He took kittens on his knee; welcoming a spot where humanity ruled and the west wind was shut out, moaning sulkily.

Dinner seemed principally to consist of lobsters, served cold in the shells (of which a red ruin was carried out), and of mutton and crabs, the latter dressed cunningly. Acland forgot his delicate digestion, and excavated lobster with greedy relish.

There was no going out after dinner: the stormy clouds had spread; the rain plashed down. So they played Bridge, and Sir Edmund and Evie won, because Standish's habitual depression extended that evening to invariable Spades, and his partner paid unhappily, noting to the debit side in his neat pocket-books. His bedroom had a sloping roof, and the window was let into the floor, an arrangement which resulted in a roaring draught lifting the bed-clothes. The framework of the bed was of wood; so uneasy a structure that Acland requested Phillips, who was placing a tin bath in place, to decide as to its safety. Phillips considered the bed might be slept in, and was then peevishly asked by his master what he meant by arranging baths overnight.

"To catch the water, sir," said Phillips cheerfully. "Towels and sponges to deaden the drip, sir. Ellie assures me that as this is the largest room, it is also the wettest. Good-night, sir."

Acland was tired; he slept heavily, and it seemed still night when Standish, very tall and melancholy, appeared at his bedside. The eternal Dunhaven

tempests raved outside the blindless windows : it was grey morn, cold and cheerless.

"What!" blinked Acland sleepily.

"Time for a dip," said Standish despotically.

Acland sat up; he caught a glimpse through the floor of grey breakers, white-crested, and realised his doom. At the sea people *bathed*. They combated with those cold waters and called it pleasure. In England, at broad noon, towed in a sand-strewn box into smooth, warm water it was tolerable, but here—

A gleam of sunshine struck upwards through the window.

"Glorious morning!" said Standish. "Oh, rouse up, Sandy. Here's Phillips."

Acland rose. He donned the Dunhaven morning costume of a great-coat and pyjamas, Standish waiting clamorously below.

"Phillips," he said peevishly. "Carry the towels. Come with me. Hang the sea, Phillips."

"Certainly, sir," said Phillips, taking up his burden.

The reality exceeded all imaginings. A scramble across fields with rude wind chilling drearily; a final descent down a steep place to the sea, where Standish slipped and Acland fell. The bathing-place itself a long tongue of rock running into a boisterous sea. No shelter of discreet wheeled houses; not even a cave to dress in. There were several other pleasure-seekers swimming in the grey depths or drying in the arctic breeze. Standish put a stone on his overcoat, revealed his lean, brown self to the morning, and dived into the deep waters which ran at one side of the rock. At the other, the breakers thundered on the sand. Sir Edmund, who had met them, followed suit; but Acland, quoting his doctor, clung to his coat and hovered unhappily. Standish came

up, purple-faced, declaring it was lukewarm, and that sea-water hurt no man.

"Allow me, sir." Phillips, secure in his warm suit, removed his master's coat. "Now, sir," and Acland came pinkly from his pyjamas.

Acland declaring that it looked Arctic, as the breeze swooped at his defenceless form, poised on the brink, looking down at the dull waters, watching little cold waves come smacking at the rock.

Standish climbed out, ready for another dive; he looked, a gleam lit his sombre eyes, and he lurched awkwardly against the undecided man. Acland screamed, and went down to the bitter sea, but as he fell, he clutched at the nearest thing to him, which happened to be his valet's legs. For once in his life Phillips lost his presence of mind; his howl, as he was dragged over the edge, was worthy of any ordinary mortal. Pink, naked master and blue-clad man clove the waves together, sending up a splash of spray, and emerged, both blowing frantically. Matters would even then have been less complicated if they had not happened to fall upon Graves, who was swimming near, and involve him in their ruin. Phillips got away, clambered up the rock like a sea-monkey, and fled, dripping for home; Acland, very much bewildered, and no swimmer, caught the infuriated baronet by the hair and held him under while he gasped himself. By the time two men came to the rescue, Graves was half drowned, and his language when he could speak, visibly rose the temperature.

"Why—the—what—business had a man to come into deep water who could not swim? You—you—"

Acland assured him in precise tones . . . still

holding on as he did so . . . that his coming was not premeditated: the wind had, in fact, suddenly arisen and blown him there, thumping him behind, also that he believed his victim to be Phillips. He then scaled the rock, hurting his toes in the effort, and cried for his man, his sea-bathing over. A blue blur far off on the bay represented that faithful servitor, so Acland had to dry himself with wet towels and to listen to much abuse until they returned to breakfast. It was not a convivial walk: Graves, who had dressed on the rock, muttered unpleasing comments. Acland wondered how he had been flung into the sea by the sudden whirlwind. It had not agreed with him: his complexion was pale purple, his limbs like lead, and, Nora Hartland, seeing him, dived to the kitchen and produced hot coffee hurriedly, rating Standish as she did so. The shock of icy Atlantic waters were not advisable to a breakfastless and delicate man.

"In fact, you are a fool, Standish," said Nora severely. "You might have picked a dead man out of the water."

"We nearly did," said Standish, penitent at heart, but recounting the drowning of Graves with some relish. "Every time Ned came up he wanted to curse so badly he couldn't take a breath; you'd hear half a d—n in the bubbles, and then Sandy had him down again. He was black in the face when we pulled Sandy off him."

"Phillips," called Acland severely, down the little passage.

"Sir," said Phillips, instantly appearing in dry clothes, Ellie, behind him, carrying a sopped bundle of blue.

Dunhaven was at its best that morning. The rain

had passed, a wild wind swept landwards. The sea rose white-crested, running with the romping breeze ; it dashed among pointed rocks, dragged seawards unwilling as a naughty child, foaming and spuming, waiting for the hour when wind and tide should combine to let it come roaring high upon the patient shore. The sun shone, colouring the rocks to blotches of madder brown and yellow ; the sands of the bay were a golden arc, hemmed round by blue, save in one spot where Annan River runs out, staining it as it comes with its burden from the bogs.

There was life in this sea world to-day. The kelp-gatherers were busy with their long rakes as they clawed in their clammy harvest with its red-hued ribbons and tangle of smaller weed. Sure-footed jennets drew carts out over the slippery flat rocks, and the women and children tossed in their spoil until it heaped high and odorous. There are no poor at Dunhaven, the sea gives generously.

Evie insisted on shrimping : she dived into pools and filled a bag with the little transparent prey, teaching Acland, who went with her, how to slip the net along the ledges ; how to pursue the wily little things as they darted backwards from the trap which menaced them ; above all, how not to sit down suddenly, which he did several times, betrayed by heeled shoes.

They filled their bag, and then she led him out across tumbling rocks, until they reached the high point which showed at every tide. Here the wicked depths of the sea seemed revealed. Great, sullen pools amass with huge weed ; deep-hued slimy trails and stems lurking in sullen, evil smoothness ; deep holes where a man could drown, below black ledges ; and everywhere the constant whisper and movements of restless

waters; the boom and rush of the breakers outside, never still there in the calmest weather. The sea dimpling, heaving; apparently at rest; then the sudden roller rising, swelling, coming towering on; sheen of translucent green through the spuming crest; the swift rush; the crash and grind of the weight of water as it toppled to its foaming death; the gulp of the back-suck as it rushed out.

Standish was busy with a gaff, pulling kicking squirming crabs and lobsters from mysterious holes, and putting them into a sack, where they twisted and writhed horribly.

Evie and Sandy went out as far as it was possible to, walking on rocks which were only revealed at spring-tide. It was as if some dormant monster opened its mouth, revealing the terrors of its fangs, as the sea mouthed sullen at either side, gleaming up at them, lapping coldly, chained still by the falling tide.

"Sluish."

A wave rose suddenly, clutching at them, roaring backwards greenly, and all the hidden waters behind them trembled and murmured in response. Their hour of exposure was over, the sea came back.

"The tide has turned. See how it rushes in. It is a spring tide, so we must go quickly."

Evie walked back along the ledge, watching the waves rush up. Already the deep pools stirred, the snake-like seaweed uncoiled its feelers; the breakers rose. The monster was loose.

"See!" Evie pointed to the narrow slip of rock they crossed down on a channel of quiet water. "They call that the custom-gap; for the sea takes its custom there. The women come gathering dillusk, and some stay too late; there is no crossing by the bridge, so they must wade, and gentle as that channel looks

it runs like a race, if you lift a foot, the sea claims you. It has claimed many in its time." The tide rose so quickly that in a few minutes the narrow ledge they had gone out to was a spume of breaking waters. Now as they stood low, the great, green waves seemed rushing in upon them high over their heads, crossing, meeting, with long foaming crests, roaring back from slippery rocks, thundering threats at the puny two. "It frightens me," Evie spoke, poising her little body on a pointed rock. "It's so vast out there, Mr. Sandy. And we are so small, mere straws, if one of those waves caught us. Such funny items in a big world. Always wanting and never getting."

"You ought to get most things you want," said Acland, the compliment rendered gloomy by his sixth fall.

He got up, the memory jarring unpleasantly.

"I don't, then," said Evie. "At least—I don't know."

Her pretty eyes looked back towards the shore. Standish, bearing a resemblance to the palmer whom St. Nicholas relieved of his load in the desert by the Red Sea, was going home. Nora Hartland and Graves were seated on a rock. Between them and land lay bright, sunny pools, sea anemones starring them.

"He's afraid," said Evie, suddenly getting up; a cloud of spray blew over them. "He, Sir Edmund; he never comes out on the bridge; says its dangerous with those breakers. Yet you came, whom he calls a hen in the water. . . . Oh, I beg your pardon."

"Don't mention it," said Acland, his polite tone belled by his purple colour. "Is it, then—you now, Miss Evie?"

"Now?" said Evie, woman-like, offended. "Oh,

of course you mean your wife long ago. They were boy and girl. Don't be absurd, Sandy," for Acland cavilled at this. "He must have been a boy once. Yes, it's me now. And he's rich. I've a young brother somewhere at a cheap school . . . and oh, why have the wrong people all the money?"

"Other people are rich," said Acland sharply, still brooding over the title of hen.

Evie knowing his economical ways, eyed him without suspicion.

"I don't meet them," she said unhappily. "Everyone's poor."

Her pretty eyes gazed at him with a sweetness which set his head spinning. She was very good to look at.

"I don't think he likes you, you know," said Evie, as they went in, the tide snarling at their heels. "Perhaps because of Kathleen. She wouldn't have him, and wrote such a letter home about you."

Sandy gritted his teeth. Somehow, he felt certain that those letters were referred to now with sarcasm.

"Money," he said quietly, "is a wonderful thing. But, little Miss Evie, don't let it drive you where you don't want to go. Suppose—" he looked up shyly—"hundreds of pounds would be cheaply spent to annoy Sir Edmund Graves.—If you really want any. If you're in trouble, will you promise to tell . . . Could you?"

"I could," she said, looking into his worn, kindly face, and touching his hands with so much simple trust and liking that, had he been wise, he would have known that all his new little thrills were as hopeless as a flat-bottomed boat struggling in the sea by the bridge; but they pleased him nevertheless.

He looked contentedly at Graves' graceful length

lying on the sun-warmed rocks, and heard with a smile a sharp reproof for lingering so long upon the treacherous point with a spring tide rising.

"He who never ventures, never sees," said Evie gaily, with a glance at Sandy, but she allowed herself to be carried off, leaving Nora to walk home with her late companion.

As they gained the cliffs, they were astonished to observe Phillips chasing shrimps in a pool, and an admiring audience of one maid receiving the spoil. They walked home across boggy fields, the shortest way to the house.

Nora looked at Graves and Evie, shaking her head.

"I don't like it," she said suddenly. "Yet it's money and position for the child instead of perpetual poverty, and hunting the postman's pony or some four-year-old of Dayly's.

"He seems," said Acland sharply, "to prefer girls who do not like him."

"Poor Kathleen! She was scarcely civil to him. Evie does not actually dislike him. If no one else comes definitely forward, she may marry him. Kathleen was different."

Nora looked at Acland with young eyes unspoilt by years.

Evie was exquisite; but he found himself talking to this gentle Irishwoman of his inmost affairs; of that few weeks' romance with its tragic end; of many things which lay stored on back-shelves in his mind. For Nora had that rare gift of sympathy which prompts confidence.

"And Kathleen loved you," she said softly, looking at his pale face with searching eyes. "I've got her letters still."

The old remorse choked the little man ; he smiled sadly, understanding the intentness of her gaze.

"Do you, like Standish, wonder why?" he queried, a little wistfully, a new quiver on his lips.

"No, I don't," she said quietly. "I do not," she repeated half to herself, as they crossed the white-washed wall and came upon Aunts Susie and Catty basking in the sun. A precious flock of chickens scratched in sea gravel ; the blue kittens played by the hay-stack, and the old ladies fought sleepily about nothing when they woke up. Phillips, on being asked about his morning musement, actually blushed. To do him justice, he had started with milk and soda, and had fallen heavily upon the rocks, when far out, breaking the glass.

"Met Ellie, sir," he observed confusedly, "fetching sea-water for Miss Susie's bath, sir. Liking it far out, sir, and finding the net, sir, we engaged in shrimping. Remarkably slippery rocks, sir," he added, presenting his master's tonic.

Acland looked out of the window in the floor to where Graves stood waiting for luncheon.

"Like a hen in the water," he said, with thoughtful bitterness.

CHAPTER VIII

TELLING FURTHER OF THE COAST

"White steed of ocean that leap with a hollow wearisome
roar . . .

You come, and your crests are hoary with the foam of your
countless years,

You break with a rainbow of glory through the spray of your
glittering tears."

—GORDON.

EVIE HARTLAND, though pressed, declined to make any arrangements for the afternoon. She was not tempted by the idea of a walk, by an invitation to tea at the hotel, or the chance of playing tennis on the ground by the cliff. No; Sandy wanted sand-shoes; he would really hurt himself upon the rocks, and she would go to Dunhaven with him lest he should be lost. Also, she wished to meet the evening train, and get a parcel from home. Having delighted Acland by this ultimatum, she went to the window, taking undue interest in the movement of a ragged gorsoon upon the road, and presently flying out to meet him, saying she had got a message for his mother. Evie disappeared round the wall, was away for some minutes, and returned singing, calling to Sandy to get ready. He did so happily; boring Phillips by insisting on the production of a new grey suit, suitable for Henley, and rejecting

three ties before he decided on a pale blue with a pearl pin stuck in, Evie meanwhile clamouring in the trap at the door, and sarcastically demanding as he appeared if he was bound for Grafton Street.

It was one of the eight-guinea suits; Acland, seeing the dusty cushions of the governess cart, regretted having put it on. He regretted it further as he saw how close they went to the bog ditches; Evie did not appear to be looking at the road, but allowed the pony to meander at will.

They had just grazed the rushy edge of a yawning chasm, when the pony was suddenly pulled up, and Evie, rather pink-cheeked but in very casual tones, said "How d'ye do?" to a young man bending over a bicycle. She inquired the reason of his being there in rather aggrieved tones as though the road were a private one.

The young man said that his bike was broken, and he could not get on. It was annoying, as he had most important things to fetch from the afternoon train, and he glared at Acland unpleasantly. "As there was no room, he'd walk."

But Mr. Acland said there was heaps of room; he drew himself into a corner, and the tall young man, now introduced as Mr. Ievers, got in, adjusting his long legs with difficulty. He was a taking young fellow, with blue eyes, yellow hair, the clear, golden tan which goes with them, and a pleasant expression. Acland was now allowed to drive, a proceeding which eased his mind, for though no whip, he could steer clear of the crumbling edges. Directed by back ways, he brought them to the station, where Evie remembered pressing business up a seemingly desolate road, and, attended by Neill Ievers, disappeared,

both saying they would return as soon as the train came in.

It was overdue. A fringe of ragged, bare-footed boys lined the edge of the low platform, swaying their tangled heads forward to peer down the line. One caused a thrill by a swift cry that "she was comin'," to have his importance swept away as an older child denounced Mikey for fool, 'twas only the windmills sthirrin' in the breeze. There was no windmills; yet Mikey slunk back abashed.

A mile away, the morning's brightness gone, the sea ran sullen beneath a storm-cloud coming black from the horizon. Baaltard's high cliff cut across the grey sky, its horse-shoe mouth gaping clearly. Behind it the distant Kerry hills rose faint and clear, all signals heralding bad weather, storm-winds and heavy rains.

Inland, the bare, treeless land humped bleakly; little whitewashed cabins dotted here and there; cold little homes, battered by the unceasing wind.

Acland shivered; now that he was left alone, this wild coast seemed a shade worse than the Downs. He looked down the road for Evie, but she did not come. The pony waited patiently outside, tied to a cart. The Englishman commenced to watch his fellows. The platform was crowded; no one seemed surprised because the train was late; two men, tired of waiting, sat down on the edge of the platform, their feet on the rails. Michael, the porter, was hammering something, doubtless with a view to mending the engine.

Acland sat upon an empty soda-water case; two women, one young and voluble, the other grey-haired and patient, chattered just behind him, so that he found himself listening to a long and

apparently endless tale concerning an erring horse which forced its way out through a "sthable windy." The story poured on with the velocity of a mountain torrent in flood. "An' no one's fault, Mrs. Cassidy, ma'am, who'd reason for the baste to slhip out. No one to be blempt." Patient Mrs. Cassidy interluding with constant "No surelys," and "There now," as was merely polite. "'Twas this way: we put him in the house with a bit of hay, and in the early mornin', Kate Reidy was in the yard bindin' down to see to somethin', whin, hearin' the commotion, she sees the horse, his formosht legs out the windy and his hindmosht within, an' with that, she lets a bawl out of her. 'Maggie Malone's horse is dead,' says she, and with that I looks from the dour, an' I begins to roar and to bawl, for there he was, his foremosht parts out and the hindmosht within, an' but for the few rocks outside that supported his foremosht legs, he was gutted. So I roared an' I bawled, Mrs. Cassidy; an' down ran the bye in his shirt, an' the throuser in his hand, an' he stharted to bawl, an' so we gother the neighbours and got him out. But afther it all, we found he was strangled in the foremosht leg, an' to tell ye thruly, whin he was tackled, he could scarcely walk; so we got him a bit on the way, an' says I to Tom Thracy, says I: 'We must sthay at Ennistymon, an' where will we resht?' an' says he: 'Up at me cousin, Jim Thracy's; an', says I: 'Is it far?' and says he: 'No; but quite convanient, up the boteen,' says he, 'and wesht by the red cow grazin', an' on a taste,' says he; an' says I: 'Won't ye come too?' but says he, he had biziness in the sthreet, but I was to go wesht by the red cow, an' I couldn't but find it, says he, an' says I—"

It might have gone on all day, but a distant whistle

cut it short. The small boys cheered ; the women ran into the crowd ; the station-master fussed out with the baton ; but the two men sat smoking undisturbed, feet on the line, as the little train panted up at a leisurely amble. Michael rushed for engine, inquiring "what was broke?" the carriages spouted out a few tired passengers, who scrambled for their own luggage ; the women mounted to the van, and elbowed for their parcels from distant Ennis. Then after a brief, but crowded interval, the whistle hooted, and the small train rumbled off across the dreary country to its destination.

Acland watched it all with unchecked fascination.

"Marvellous!" he remarked, as he emerged from the van with Neill levers. "I could have taken anything on earth I liked—blue, meal, starch, and no one to check me."

Evie said with a smile, that honesty was the root of Ireland's poverty. Any of these people would suffer agonies if they got hold of the wrong groceries. They left the station then, driving into the one wide street which made the town. Acland was taken to the door of a small shop, and sent in to buy his shoes ; the pony waited outside, for she and Neill walked on. The little man entered, and, having discovered with pain that the boot-store was also a public-house, was led on to the shoe department two yards lower down, and finally supplied with a pair of most indifferent cloth sand-shoes, at a most exorbitant price. Remonstrance merely drawing down contempt, Acland paid with protest, nothing but the still jarring memory of the rocks inducing him to take them at all. Having declined a glass of whisky, he was informed by a waiting youth, who demanded pennies, that the young lady had gone on by the bog road, and he

was to follow. A trip to Dunhaven was proving expensive.

He thumped the Iceland freely, and on reaching the strip of desolate, ditch-fenced road, found Neill and Evie, quite oblivious of a storm of wild rain, sitting by a gate into a potato-field. But the girl smiled so brightly at Acland, that he forgot to be annoyed, and the bicycle, which could only have felt faint, had made a surprising recovery, was trundled out by Neill, and ridden swiftly away.

Acland still held the reins ; going warily between the yawning ditches, depths of brown-hued water. Evie, after a few minutes silence, pointed to a low, thatched cottage, with its back to the sea.

"They, the Ievers, live there," she said. "It's the biggest lodge here. He'll be—that is, his father—will be Lord Clandownes some day, if everyone dies all right. His mother's detestable, stuck up, fat, and wants him to marry an heiress."

"Mr. Ievers is, then," said Acland, "going back to Dunhaven ; is this his shortest way home ?"

Evie, a little pink, said perhaps so, and as the Iceland was whacked round the corner, they all but drove over a fat pug-dog, trailing a strap at its lazy heel. A stout, middle-aged lady, with whatever good looks she had possessed buried in a mask of selfish complacency, shrieked unhappily, and Acland pulled up. A well-preserved man of fifty, very like Neill, but without his hopeful expression, picked the dog up and soothed it.

Various regrets necessitating conversation, Mrs. Ievers—Evie had immediately called her by her name—spoke.

"We are waiting for Neill," she said, rather pointedly. "He went out on his bicycle, an' I

neard took the bog road. Did you not pass him?"

"It was an exceedingly fine evening for a ride," said Miss Evie pleasantly. "No; we did not pass him," and she whipped the pony to an objecting gallop.

"We didn't," she said indignantly, looking at Sandy's face. "Don't look idiotic; I saw explanation trembling on your lips. Why should I say anything when Neill doesn't want to go out walking with them?"

"Oh," said Acland, "I see. Well, naturally a boy prefers faster exercise."

"Yes, naturally. But he's not a boy," said Evie sharply, grazing the gate-post. "Yes; I've got the chicken food, Aunt Susie. Here it is."

Then she went to her room and did not appear for some time. The grass near the hall door was strewn with drying serge garments, and a pleasant odour from the kitchen promised hot cakes.

Dunhaven, however, did not please the man from London. He could not be induced to hunt for crabs at low tide. He was let off bathing; but when, in what Standish called a flat calm, he was induced to go out fishing, an hour's ascent and descent of the great Atlantic rollers reduced him to green ruin and chicken-broth for twenty-four hours.

Phillips, on the contrary, took to it all cheerfully; he mastered the art of sitting straight in a canoe, and he did not get sea-sick; he learnt where and how to rake out crabs; in fact, he and Ellie were all but drowned upon the bridge, and were obliged to return, arm-in-arm, in a weak condition. He helped to draw the net in the bay at night; until even Standish said he was a really good servant.

Acland, who suffered from neglect, was not sure

that he agreed, though improving health made him lenient. After Dunhaven's cold winds had seriously disturbed his liver, the keen, clear, salt-laden air did him good. The flutter was generally absent; he was genuinely hungry, and could enjoy grilled mackerel, but an hour caught; lobsters and crabs and mutton; plain food which he would have sneered at two months before. The principal thorn in his life was the weekly bill for Crimson Rambler, who had gone amiss and was out of training. It made him positively stingy to think that he must endure it for ten long months, and got him into the habit of grumbling; constantly airing a poverty which was not really his.

The weather was unsettled, an unceasing wind driving great rollers against the cliffs, along which he took his daily walk. Coming across miniature bays and bleak headlands, and one long chasm running for a hundred yards inland, in which the tide sucked groaningly, heaving in eternal shadows. Oily, deep-hued waters, crossing and recrossing in a hundred currents, deep and terrible. One thought of a man's fate if he fell down there, with no one to aid him, clinging to the smooth, precipitous rocks, washed off by the heave; watching the green sport of the thunderous waves outside where no man could swim; helpless at low tide on the little strip of stony beach, waiting for—for the inevitable end. An eerie, horrible spot, yet fascinating in its grimness, fenced round with high banks to keep out cattle and sheep.

It was a cruel and pitiless coast, untamed; defying mankind to bridle or subdue it. Heaving its crested waves, knowing no boat dare back them; snarling always at the black cliffs where its power ended. A wild beast, humanity's enemy, ever ready to

spring and devour. Purring sometimes, pretending to be asleep in the sunshine, a blue and sparkling sea, lapping the sands with gentle wavelets; yet deadliest as it crouches, for then the quicksands on the bay move, and the undertow runs beneath the smooth surface—the dragging, relentless current which has taken so many bathers out to drown. When the dead rise from the waters, Dunhaven will show a long list of victims.

Strange people, too, the fishermen, afraid of the sea monster, scarcely one of them who would lift a finger to help even seeing a life being taken. If you take from the sea, the sea will take from you, they say, and pass on, letting the great jaws suck down its prey. Once a man passed by a group of girls shrieking on the shore, watching one of their companions being slowly taken out, none of them tall or strong enough to help her. He would not meddle with the sea, so went on, to learn an hour later, that his own sister had been drowned.

Acland, used to the decorous summer seas of England, grew to know its fascination and its fear, listening to stories from the old men of its might and its revenges. How on those calm days when the strange murmur rose, the sea called, and some must go; it never cried in vain. How foolish men had dashed in, saving strangers from death, and had gone themselves a week later, claimed in recompense. How in winter the waves lashed across the road, and the foam flew like snow half a mile inland,

The Hartlands drove him to Fray, once a fishing village, now a mere row of rotting, untenanted houses, and showed him there the rock where, one by one, the fishermen had met death, until there were none left. Just beyond it was the puffing

hole; a magnificent *siffleur*, where the breakers came towering in across the unsheltered sea, and where, at half-tide, one could see rainbow-hued spray, flashing high; beautiful to watch.

The Londoner admired it all; grew better, and learned to hate Sir Edmund Graves very heartily. The hen in the water rankled, and it was followed by covert sneers which were hard to bear.

Graves did most things well, he swam, he did not get sick; he was slim of body and long of limb; yet on his side was the knowledge that a girl had left him, and accepted this little business man who could do nothing, and was flabby and fat to look at. So he sneered pleasantly: twitting Acland's economies, mocking with ready Irish tongue at England and her ways: devoting himself to Evie, and pushing Acland aside in a carelessly open way when the girl would have stayed with him. There was enmity, the stronger for being veiled, between the two; they measured swords, and it looked as though the smaller man would never score a point in the duel. Graves flung money about; sent for Fuller's sweets for Evie, gave to the ragged children who helped them at their picnics. Acland counted his halfpence and weighed his letters with unfailing regularity. Yet, when they collected for a poor old woman who broke her leg upon the rocks gathering seaweed, he laid down five pounds by Sir Edmund's sovereign, without a thought of ostentation, and Nora looked at him curiously.

"It is not much to keep her for the winter," he said, in his precise way.

They had been at Dunhaven for about ten days, when Standish commanded an expedition to Dooloch Lake to catch trout. He borrowed a

bicycle for his unwilling cousin by marriage, provided him with a fishing-rod, and resistance was useless.

Their start was a little marred by the cook's announcement that Miss Catty's cats had the chicken for the sandwiches mauled to rights, and further inquiries as to whether she'd cut off the teeth-marks and use it.

Having been summarily ordered not to, she took a gloomy stand by the door, and said they must go hungry. There was no chance of eggs till four o'clock, all the last having been boiled for the young dorkings, and was then removed by the old ladies, who volunteered to drive for fresh provisions, and declared they did not believe all they heard. This having been arranged, Sandy Acland and Standish started. It was a fine day. A bleak expanse of tossing, white-crested sea; long, jagged streaks of cloud against a pallid sky. They rode round the bay, where the sea licked, foaming, at a circle of golden sand. Past the little dreary lodges perched in front of the sand-hills; over Anna River; running, brown-hued, to lose itself on the beach, crossing the quaint, old bridge, carved with long crosses, and then turning inland, climbing upwards, ever upwards, to the severe detriment of Acland's short wind. The fields red purple with loosestrife, the banks ablaze with golden flea-bane.

Standish suddenly lost his way; the narrow roads branched in many directions, and he forgot the right one. He applied for aid to a very old man, being propped upon his ass's cart-shaft by a small grandson.

"The road to Dooloch?" yelled Standish, fearing deaf ears.

"Doo-loch!" It was a different word, rolled softly

from the toothless mouth. "Dooloch! Let ye go straight on until ye turn to the right, not up to Mulloch, pass that an' carry on till ye laves the fust road to the right, an' pasht Clancy's Farm, then turn left-handed, an' push on agin', an' thin turn straight easht an' ye'll be there."

"Great heavens!" said Acland, weaving helpless webs with his hands. "What does it all mean?"

Standish remarked severely that it was as plain as daylight that they were to turn off at the third next cross, and then they could ask again, if it was necessary.

Acland thought it would be necessary.

The road changed, heaving itself into short mountains, up which Acland walked slowly, and short abysses down which he slid, both breaks jarring; while his second cousin by marriage whizzed far out of sight, with his feet upon the coasters.

But they got to the lake at last; slipping over the last hump to see it rippling below them, cuddled into the hollows between the dark hills. The air was sweet with the scent of bog-myrtle, light clouds flecked the sky, a soft breeze blew. Standish said the day was made for fishing.

It took Acland a long time to get his things together; he had not fished since he was a boy. The flies stuck all over him, the knots in the flimsy gut came undone, but he did it at last, and finding one of the wettest spots on the crumbling verge, perched himself upon a stone and smote the waters, thinking it all extreme humbug. The trout at Dooloch are small; but fortunately they are hungry and numerous. Humbug, was it? London, business, failing health, all paled and died as the wet gut tightened, and he got

his first bite. The small trout tugged, the fisherman reached for his net, and dipped out a gasping fish. Standish called out that he had better get a gaff, with a bray of laughter, but Sandy heeded him not. It was first blood ; he could catch fish. He flung the net away, he whipped and chucked, and lost and landed, with all a novice's joy. Scrambling over marshy ground to unhook his gasping catch, which quivered on death-beds of bog-myrtle. Twice he slipped from his stone, and sat down emphatically amid a cloud of surprised spray ; once he lurched forward and splashed to his knees, but the soft wind touched his face, the breath of bog and mountain was in his nostrils, the pile of little bodies grew. In dealing death he forgot it, and the grim shadow slipped from his side.

He was absorbed, casting awkwardly over a cat's-pawed spot, when he heard himself called, and turned to see Evie Hartland, her pretty face alight ; further back he saw Nora, Graves, and Neill levers unstrapping baskets and lighting a fire. They had fetched red turf from a cottage.

"Oh !" Evie stared, wicked dimples about her mouth. "You are muddy," she said softly.

Acland rubbed his wet face and smiled.

"It was such fun," he said, half in apology, laying down his rod.

"You look as if you had enjoyed it," she said.

"Enjoyed it is scarcely the word," he replied, admiring her.

She might have been a spirit of the mountains, there was something so fresh about her. Her bright hair and eyes and soft, childlike mouth.

"I did not know that levers was coming," said Sandy, wiping off mud.

"Oh, yes ; he always meant to, when we arranged it. He bicycled up with me." She fingered some coarse grass dubiously. "It's rather funny, you know, but I told him yesterday morning, and Sir Edmund met him late last night, and told him we were all going into Dunhaven instead. So if it had not been for the cats and the chickens we should not have met him at all. I can't understand. Oh, here are the aunts and your man."

Phillips lashed the Iceland over the last hump, the old ladies painfully holding a large basket in its place, and looking very tired.

"They told me as we passed them," said Evie, "that Phillips could make the pony go so much faster than they could, so they held the basket. Phillips, as Standish says, is a man of recourse."

Acland wondered, seeing Miss Catty descend, shaking a stiff arm, if it could be so ; but Phillips was already bearing the basket across, with a benevolent and inscrutable face.

Nora had made the fire blaze ; a frying-pan had been borrowed and little trout were cooked. Anyone who has never tried freshly-caught fish frizzled over a turf fire, had better immediately go to Dooloch and do so. There was no table-cloth, and everyone cut their own slices off the pound of butter, but they were much too hungry to be particular. The only thing Acland avoided were chicken sandwiches, which Miss Catty pressed on everyone and said she had made herself.

"And if it hadn't been for the blessed cats," said Neill happily, from behind a chunk of soda loaf, "I'd never have met you, or have come to the picnic. Graves says now he never said you weren't coming. Very stupid and deaf of me."

"Very," said Miss Hartland drily, eating hard-boiled eggs. "Oh, very." She looked at Graves with a variety of expressions. "Does he"—she dropped her voice—"often tell you of Evie's movements?"

"Sometimes," said Neill ingenuously, and blushing.

"For the future," said Nora Hartland, regarding her portion of egg very intently. "I should use salt. When people want things themselves they are not usually generous."

"Not usually . . ." Neill paused in astonishment, holding his knife, which he had reached out for a chunk of butter, poised above Sandy's head. "Usually . . ." he repeated.

"Open your eyes," said Nora, in the same low voice.

"Great Scott!" rasped out Neill, suddenly seeing. And the butter dropped. Sandy had been eating trout unconsciously. The sun had melted this product of cream. After Sandy had made matters much worse by grasping at the soft morsel on his hair, and had spun round several times, using bad language, Phillips came to the rescue with a spoon and some grass, and the episode ended.

"Make it grow, man," said Graves pleasantly, referring to the small thin spot, which Acland believed invisible. "It fell just on the right place."

"It won't dye it, at any rate," observed Acland acidly, his colour heightened.

"Oh, dear, no, much the same shade," said Graves, quite undisturbed. "Eh, Miss Evie?"

"Gold is a very nice colour," retorted Evie sharply, but she looked, strange to say, at another fair head.

Neill, after some slight regrets, stared moodily at his plate.

They left the remains of the feast to eat fruit sent

from Ballymacshane, and when Acland rose to get his rod, he observed his man fishing on the opposite side of the lake, which is some distance round. The theory that sound is supposed to carry far across water is evidently a fallacy, for, though Acland shrieked himself hoarse, Phillips fished on without raising his head. Acland did not care to walk, so when Evie and Neill offered to carry the message, he accepted. Unfortunately, they lost their way and got into the hills by mistake; so resigning himself to an afternoon's idleness, he sat near Nora, envying the deft way she handled her rod and threw her line, so that the flies danced lightly on the rippling surface, and little trout hurried up to death.

The old ladies dozed contentedly. Peace ruled the world. Sir Edmund alone abandoned fishing, and appeared to be annoyed. He looked round the lake, shook his head, and came along to them, asking why Neill and Evie had not come back.

"They apparently," said Acland, watching a trout come at the fly, "have lost their way. Certainly they have never reached Phillips."

"Lost fiddlesticks," muttered Graves crossly.

"Or they have encountered a boggy and uncrossable trench," said Acland, still absorbed. "Oh, got him!" with rapture, as the trout flashed and the gut grew taut. "As they have not got round," he went on, ripping the fly from the poor little jaws, "something must have occurred."

"Hang fool of an English tradesman!" said Graves thunderously, as he walked off.

"I wonder what he called me that time," said Acland. "He was not pleased. He hates me, Miss Nora." The "Miss" was a sop to propriety, as he had been forbidden to use the more formal Hartland.

"For memory's sake," said Nora, "and also because . . . Evie is so much with you." Her troubled eyes sought two dots on the hill-side, which she alone saw—dots very close together in the shelter of a big boulder. She believed that Sandy understood; whereas he saw nothing, looking on the friendship as mere play between boy and girl. "I'm afraid of him, Sandy. He is cunning and strong; he has money, and he will wait on, until the child marries him, and is miserable for all her life. It would be such a nice world if the right people always married each other. Only then . . . they could give up paying parsons to preach, because no one would ever do wrong. The very babies would breathe in such an atmosphere of content as they grew up that goodness would be mere nature to them."

Acland lost this dissertation; he had become business-like and wished to know the exact amount of Sir Edmund's income.

"At least two thousand a year—the pig!" said Miss Hartland gloomily.

Alexander Acland wrote it in his pocket-book. He knew that he could pick Graves' income out of his own and scarcely miss it; but he did not say so. Only that very morning, embittered by the arrival of the *Crimson Rambler's* account, which he had shown miserably to Nora, he had quarrelled for quite ten minutes with the postman because that worthy demanded payment for a redirected letter. They had all listened to this strife for twopence, and also to Paddy's departing remark that he couldn't do with "thim skhinflints of English, that'd argy the shell off a lobster's back for a pinny, let alone delayin' payin' up the Land Act."

So Nora never suspected him of the riches he

possessed; pitying him rather as a man who could not be poor without worrying.

Acland put his pocket-book away, and returned to drink smoky tea and soda-cake smothered in butter and strawberry jam—a food he would have relegated to the nursery in London. He prepared without alacrity for his twelve-mile ride, being exceedingly tired.

At this point Phillips, absolutely desolated at the accident of having taken his master's rod, arrived, assuring everyone, with grave deference, that he had believed it to be a spare one. Having added his catch to the day's bag, he observed Acland's white face and considered. He would ride the bicycle homewards, and Mr. Acland could drive the pony. Phillips then left immediately, saying he would take a long time to get home. He was fervently thanked; but later, when his master discovered that he had to do most of the packing-up, to balance the baskets and the fish and beat the pony, he was not so sure. The drive was long and weary; constant, uneven galumpetting of the Iceland upon the level, and crawling up or down the hills. It took over two hours to compass; and it was very late when they turned out by the bay, gleaming now in a clear evening light, soft clouds floating on an amber sky. The rocks lowering blackly; white foam licking them.

He was jarred and somewhat bruised, with a delicate tracery of fish-scales on his trouser-leg, when they reached Seaview. Phillips and Ellie were taking the air upon the wall. The former received his master with sympathy, but a visible consciousness of gratitude due as he helped him into his evening clothes. It was Acland's pleasure

to appear each evening correctly attired; it was also the dismay of Patsy's mother as she wrestled with the starching.

August waned wetly. Fine days were few. Sea-view behaved like the rose of a watering-can—full charged with water. It spouted. The dining-room chimney was so stocked with "daas'" nests that a fire was impossible, so they ate dankly, between weeping walls. Little lakes ran in under the doors; the roof leaked in unexpected places, chivying sleep with heavy blobs on nose or cheek, dripping incessantly. The carpets smelt of bad seaweed, the chairs like beds of moss. Chceriness became a difficulty, for the rooms were too small to sit in, and Standish was the only one who seemed to enjoy going out and getting wet through.

Acland wrestled with an umbrella which got turned inside out, or he stayed in during the rain, to get very stuffy and hot before a roaring fire. The leghorn chickens had to be transported to the kitchen, and tragedy ensued, the cook dropping a saucepan upon one, and then rending the air with her wails, for she adored Miss Susie.

"An' bad cess to the weather," she wept, as she burst upon them with the little flattened corpse. "Ye can't turn round in the bit of a kitchen. There was Ellie there, jokin', an' Hannah, an' Mистер Phillips, like a lord, no less, 'atin' lobsther with a fork . . . an' I didn't know where I was. Someone hit agin' me, an' the pot lepped from me hand on to the innicint crayther."

Here she wept sorely.

Miss Susie wept too, assuring them all that it was a little hen which would have laid eggs, and there was a funeral in the rain, with a soap-box as coffin, and

Miss Susie in a waterproof, digging with a fire-shovel. The tragedy passed, but it helped to deepen the gloom.

There was the episode of Mrs. Ievers' call, so exceedingly gracious that she was almost rude, and the stately manners of the two old ladies as they gave her tea, but refused to let her oust the kittens from the big chair. Her uncertain perch upon one of the wicker babies made her even more sweetly acid.

It ended as all things do, be they good or bad ; even the most perfect happiness is marred by the knowledge that as it comes it passes ; and the day before they left they were asked to dinner by Graves at the Dunhaven Hotel. It was Seaview on a larger scale—a gaunt, gloomy barrack, its long, lean face to an unclipt meadow, its peeling back to the heaving sea . . . with ghosts of dead furniture in the mouldy rooms, and the waves reaching up over slippery, slimy rocks into the windows. The view across the bay was wild and fine ; the smells were gratis, Dunhaven ideas of drainage not being advanced, so that when the tide receded a foot or two the smell rose unchecked ; and yet a fine building on a splendid coast, if anyone had looked after it.

The smell greeted them heartily in Sir Edmund's sitting-room—a three-cornered little place, furnished with a prehistoric book-case and three small chairs ; also a table with a mouldy cloth. They crowded about uncomfortably, and the falling sea clamoured at the window.

Mrs. Ievers exclaimed faintly at the overpowering odour, and when the windows were shut they stifled.

It was not a successful dinner-party. Sir Edmund Graves knew his own reasons for bringing unfriendly neighbours together.

Evie Hartland was badly dressed, poverty stamped on her faded silk blouse and skirt of a bygone age; for it is only in the penny novelette that the home-made muslin ousts the confection from Worth or Paquin. Mrs. Ievers was resplendent in handsome silks. That may have been one reason. The tall, thin man knew his world; he saw the fine lady's eyes light with disapproval on the pretty piece of shabbiness. Next, Mrs. Ievers oppressed them all by a bland patronage, the species of cooing friendliness which arouses evil passion in the recipient. She used it to Evie, and the foolish little girl, chafing under it . . . scarlet as Neill's mother told her sweetly how she ought to pin a fichu across her blouse, and make it quite up to date . . . turned all her worse side outwards, and grew pert and prickly, making silly, smart speeches and sharp retorts. This may have been another reason. Neill eyed her unhappily, but with a wistful and unchanged tenderness. A look in his eyes said that things were going hardly with him.

The party was foredoomed, and accident brought grave-diggers to help to bury it.

Acland perched primly on the window-ledge, made matters no better by alluding to the Dooloch picnic; for Mrs. Ievers, who had known nothing of it, swooped on her son with the swiftness of a middle-aged hawk. Why had she not been asked to this delightful party? How was it that dear Neill had not mentioned it?

Neill, pink-cheeked, said he'd forgotten. Miss Susie observed softly it was much too informal an affair for Mrs. Ievers. Sir Edmund explained that Neill's presence was a mere accident, and looking across, was surprised to receive no telegraph of gratitude. The boy held down a sulky head.

Phillips, always cheerful, appeared at the door; he had come down to help.

"Dinner, Sir Edmund," he announced. "Regretable large party just arrived, Sir Edmund; Chawles quite off his head, as the chickens are limited. He tells me they are endeavouring to catch some, but—"

"That will do," snapped Graves, adding in a thunderous undertone: "You idiot!"

"Certainly, sir," said Phillips, ushering them forth.

Phillips had spoken painful truth. The long dining-room was full of hungry tourists, their motor cars standing at the door. The original dinner, consisting of a small piece of boiled mutton and two skinny chickens, was completely inadequate now. The waiter carved. Phillips, who waited on his party, altered the question of chicken or mutton to "chicken-bone or mutton turnip sauce," and was careful, recalling the "idiot," to lay a fragment of yellow skin before the host.

"Nothing more left, Sir Edmund," he said. "Unexpected arrivals helped first, and exceedingly hungry. In fact," he looked at the flustered and careering waiter, "Chawles is helping out some of the come-back-bones now—Sir Edmund."¹

This all in an audible aside. The chickens were memories; the boiled mutton had vanished as a white-sauced dream; and the whole hungry table clamoured and grumbled. They cut chunks of indifferent bread, and cursed Dunhaven and its food. It was an unfortunate incident. Some fragments of lobster procured by Phillips, and bare plates slightly flavoured with rice-pudding, having ended the feast, Mrs. Ievers, who was a heavy doer, lapsed into awful silence.

¹ This happened.

Charles, called to be abused, apologised abjectly. "He couldn't help it. There was never enough. He was sad and sorry from it all. But the cook had two Plymouth rocks cot to give to the tourists; they were, in fact, now boiling, and if his Lordship, Sir Edmund, would but wait, they could catch the black-and-white Hoodie cock for him."

"Dear me!" said the horrified Acland, as Charles waited.

"He's rooshtin' on the wall outside now, sir," said Charles, looking out. "Timsy would have him like a knife, and he'd be cooked in twenty minnits."

Sir Edmund swore at the man heartily; Mrs. Ievers, who was endeavouring to assuage her hunger with biscuits of the variety called cream-cracker, which tasted of bad cheese and sea-damp, rose majestically, saying it was unpardonable, and the black-and-white cock was left to live.

They returned sadly to the sitting-room, leaving the tourists waiting for the Plymouth rocks. A bright young party; who smiled at Mrs. Ievers' face of resigned tragedy. They, too, were hungry, but they bore it.

The rain had stopped; a sea mist loomed up, and the evening was still and warm. The sea was shrouded, but though there was not a breath of wind, was running high. They could hear the breakers booming on the rocks; great waves rose ghostly from the stillness. They sat out on the low, whitewashed wall, drinking coffee-tinged hot water, and underboiled milk, and crying out for biscuits. Neill had gone to the little shop at the end of the hotel, and came out with a box full, sitting by Evie as she crunched them up.

The tell-tale age of her dress was hidden here in

the dusk ; but one could see her bright eyes and soft, red mouth curling above strong, white teeth as she ate.

Mrs. Ievers objected to sitting out, and was exceedingly cross ; but she hid it with a mask of graciousness, put down her coffee, and sought for some pleasant subject . . . she was one of those women who cringe to superior rank, and prick what they deem inferior with verbal spikes, thinly veiled . . . she sought, and found debts ; talking of them to the pretty owner of Castleknock, who eyed her with calm comprehension, and remarked that she thought, for her part, she would really be lonely without them.

Mrs. Ievers tossed her toupee expressively. She could not understand it. She would rather live on bread and cheese than owe money. Here, sweetly condescending, wishing to include Acland in the pleasure of her conversation she appealed to him.

"Being in trade, Mr. ah—Acland," she said sweetly, "you must know how irksome and unfair debts are. How fatal in the end to both parties. How much happier dear Nora and little Evie would be if they gave up hunting, and grew little flowers for market, and kept hens, sold eggs ; all work they could do themselves. I always say so. Now, do help me, for tradespeople understand these things."

The little man reddened. Your petty financier does not call himself a trader.

He was quite sure of Mrs. Ievers' opinion, but had no intention of saying so.

"From a tradesman's point of view," he said, with ruffled feathers—"that is, a shopman's—groceries, or that class of thing—your view is correct. A shopkeeper's point is the one you argue from. Of course in large affairs—"

He was amazed to find himself the centre of shocked eyes, to hear Standish vainly endeavouring to turn his bray of laughter into a sneeze. To see Graves looking furious, and Mrs. Ievers assume the hue of a live lobster.

The silence that followed was poignant; until gentle Miss Catty broke it by rising to take her leave, and to give dignified thanks for so pleasant an evening. She knew it was early; but she feared so much that Sultan, the grey kitten, might not have got his evening meal of fish.

Mrs. Ievers remained; she bade the uncomprehending Acland so icy an adieu that he quailed unhappily; it was followed by an icier from his host. Then directly they were out of earshot, Standish hit him hard upon the shoulder and laughed unrestrainedly.

"Did you know it, Sandy?" he asked. "I wouldn't have missed the old cat's face for five pounds. Advising Evie about her clothes and Nora about her debts, and calling you a tradesman—and—"

"Know what?" said Acland, bewildered."

"Why, that her father was Mulligan, the big grocer in Dawson Street. That's where her money comes from. And she knows we all know it, though she tries to hide it. Well done, Sandy!"

"It was exceeding rude," said the little man, troubled. "I trust she is assured that I did not mean it."

"If you argued from here to America, you wouldn't convince her of that," said Standish happily. "You won't be asked to Droveen, my boy."

They walked on past Seaview, going down to the cliffs. The shrouding mist veiled the restless sea, but as they sat down enjoying the warmth, they could see monster waves rise suddenly, majestic in

that clinging stillness ; loom up, great walls of water, magnified by uncertainty of outline, and crash downward with a thunderous roar. There had evidently been a storm far out at sea. The smaller waters were uneasy ghosts, whispering timidly in creek and channel, playing with the seaweed's rustling fingers, but outside, those huge sea-waves rose and fell off the point, and the muffled, continual growl of surf came through the veil of fog.

The wild west coast in a new mood, a mighty, terrifying thing in its dim uneasiness.

Acland moved away from the others, watching it, thinking what a man's fate would be caught under those walls of water ; flung upwards, carried on the curving crest, carried on to be beaten down, stunned to a smothering death. A puny, hopeless little land insect if one of those monsters crept on him at the point to-night. A voice spoke at Acland's elbow—Neill's. He had slipped away from his people.

"A great sea and dead calm," he said dreamily. "There's something almost uncanny about it. How those mountains rise out of the stillness."

The other had gone down on the rock to be nearer to the booming waves.

"Acland," said Neill suddenly, dropping his young length upon the short grass. "Tell me, you've seen a lot of the world. Do you always believe people?"

"I endeavour to make money, to strive with brother-strivers," said Acland, with dry precision. "My efforts would not go far if I did."

"But apart from money. That's one branch of life, and I'm sick of its name. I could be happy in a cottage myself, with a couple of hunters in the pig-sty—I refer to other things. If someone pretended to be a great friend—and yet—you found that whatever he

told you was generally wrong? If they told you that patience was your only game, when someone resents patience? If they insinuated every day that a certain person was not a bit what they seemed to be, but only wanted to get on, and marry money, and you were not sure if it was true? What then? Would you believe them?"

Acland was neither quick nor observant. He failed to piece the puzzle, though he pitied Neill for being involved in some love trouble, and gave kindly advice.

"I'd go straight to headquarters, my boy, if I were you," he said quietly. "Second-hand tales and hearsay have sent more men to the devil than any listed crime. Find out. Write to the—person . . . or see them and know for yourself. Half the troubles of the world would fall if they were discussed. That's an older man's advice. Some people delight in making mischief. If it was that fellow, Graves," he added, with sudden heat, "I wouldn't believe a word he said."

"Thank you," said Neill, rising. "I'll take your advice. I've been messing along blindly, not seeing things. They've kept me at home, you see, and I'm only a country bumpkin. But I begin to see now where I stand."

The others came up, Evie looked troubled, lagging behind. A tremble in her voice spoke of checked tears.

Standish said gloomily that he believed the devil was boiling kettles and the steam was coming through the sea. It was ghostly. One would not have been surprised to see the rocks heave and slit, and some mighty wave come sweeping, dooming them, across to the land.

Neill fell back with Evie, talking earnestly ; they did not come in.

Standish cried down the passage as he reached the open hall door.

"Ellie," he said, "or Mary, bring up anything the cats haven't got at. And some cake and fruit and a few lobsters. Some dinners make one very hungry."

They bade good-bye to Dunhaven next day in a pitiless rainfall. Sullen seas raging up against a patter of paltry rain. Lash of mighty thunderous waters, on rock and sand . . . of little wind-driven waters on a sodden land . . . the whole dull sky moving up from the dark West to cross a mist-hidden world.

"A strange place," said Acland, looking back at the black cliffs, the humping sand-hills, the stretch of wide bay, yellow-hued from Annan's flood ; the little lonely houses, soon to be left to be battered, blind-eyed and cold, by the rage of winter storms.

A dreary place to look for pleasure in ; exuding damp inside and out ; yet with a fascination of its own. So that those who go, go again, loving the wildness of the cruel sea.

"Certainly the queerest seaside resort I have known," said Acland, "and perhaps the queerest part of it was our dinner-party with the dinner missing."

This in low tones.

"And you," smiled Evie, who was radiant as a new risen sun—"you, Sandy, were the nicest thing at it."

It was breathed in an undertone, with an accompaniment of grateful, shining eyes and smiling mouth. It was enough to make wiser heads swim, yet done in all innocence by Evie, whose eyes were now glued to a certain long-thatched cottage, and

who was principally thinking of the retort which had routed Mrs. Ievers.

Michael said it was all right. The toy train grunted and ran off through the dreary, treeless land. Dunhaven vanished and was of the past.

CHAPTER IX

WHICH TELLS OF BUYING HORSES

"The ways of a man with a maid be strange, but simple and tame.

"To the ways of a man with a horse when buying or selling the same."

—KIPLING.

WHEN the Blundells returned from the sea, and the whole world appeared to migrate to the horse show, Acland did not care to go. There was no room to be found for him in the crowded hotels, and the prospect of uncertain lodgings did not appeal to him. So he rested, kept company by the old ladies, during a week of bright August sunshine, placidly happy strolling about the gardens, or resting under the beech tree, carefully studying sporting works as he had once studied the racing novels, but this time without enthusiasm. The idea of jumping large obstacles on valuable horses was quite a different thing to the once happy hope of rustling jackets and singing whips, and the subsequent payments by some race company of a substantial stake won by his Crimson Rambler. The picture of the richest Commoner's first jump in "Ask Mamma" possessed a distinct fascination. Acland studied it constantly, and, like that sporting youth, felt certain that he would "not sit on at the jumps." To balance

this, he comforted himself with the idea that he did not intend to jump at all; he would always remain upon the roads, and thus solve that difficulty. Poor Sandy! He little knew Standish Blundell and his horses.

The little man took his fill of rest and fresh air, and felt himself growing stronger daily. The mornings were not hours of weariness, but comfortable moments of laziness; he saw the tired lines fade from his face, and the flabby skin grow firmer and clear, and was far from discontented. In fact, he wrote to Grattan to say so, and as he forbore to use more than one page on the subject of expense, the doctor knew that this cure was a success.

Letters arrived telling of a marvellous show—of Standish's success with the brown four-year-old, and failure to sell Holy Robin; of the sale in the harness classes of the flighty black, and of the fine price which Nora had received for the chestnut saved by Sandy. Then the travellers returned, Holy Robin with them, and strings of long-coated, untrimmed hunters commenced to fill the stables.

Sandy was drawn to the big chestnut's box. He was quite pleased to see the white face and long legs safe back at Ballymacshane. He said so, stroking the youngster's velvety nose. The horse was very taking with his size and shining bright coat.

"You'll buy this one yet, sir," said Tom, smiling. "An' whin you're on him an' off no one'll catch you."

"Dear me!" said Sandy, disturbed by a vision of an endless flight through space.

"He can gallop away from anythin' we have," proceeded Tom, making matters plainer. "There was never yit one of his breedin' that couldn't fly

like the winds." And Sandy felt relieved as he understood. "Indade, we'd race him if he'd sthand."

Here Tom coughed to aver an indiscretion, and Standish called opportunely:

"I have her here for you, Sandy — Blackbird. Come out and see her. You'd travel Ireland and not find a mare to match you as this one will. She can stay for ever—she can't fall—and she'll mind you where you couldn't mind her."

Sandy emerged hastily to see this paragon. Standish was holding the bridle of a long, low, black mare, with great quarters and shoulders, well rubbed up for her sex, deep girthed, and with a lean head well set on.

"Did you ever see one more perfectly topped?" said Standish enthusiastically.

He spoke correctly. Blackbird's eight-year-old legs were best ignored. She had been fired for curbs and doubtful tendons, blistered for various splints. Her joints were gummy and swollen, she dished in front and brushed behind, and was a painful example of a three-hundred-guinea animal put on to the wrong stand. She had been bred to a farmer on the Cork side, who had hunted her for a season and vainly essayed to sell her, until Standish, noting her performances, had come forward, and got her for an old plough horse, a fiver, and a red setter pup—with ten shillings back for luck. She had carried him brilliantly, received a fresh blistering all round, and was now destined for Sandy.

"She makes a very slight noise," said Standish, "but it doesn't stop her. She's absolutely made for you.—Here, get up on her."

The mare was saddled. Sandy Acland, visibly uneasy, mounted. He remembered the chestnut,

But Blackbird was full of grass and very lazy—she ambled round the yard, bending her lean neck to the reins, turning and twisting, and shaking Sandy sorely when she jogged, but the little man liked the process.

"She appears docile," he observed, having compassed a trot from the manure heap in the far yard. "No doubt she would be very suitable to me to ride on. Is she expensive?"

Standish, having allowed a variety of expressions to illuminate his gloomy face, muttered: "Heaven deliver me from—bit off the obvious tail," and replied Sandy could have her for £50—as she stood—and she was the cheapest thing he'd ever buy.

Acland slid to the ground, made the complete circuit of Blackbird, which he always considered horsey and discreet, observed that she appeared to be a little gouty about her ankle-joints and would be the better of some Knutnows Powders, if made for horses, but proffered no dissent.

He did not understand horse-dealing—or that his host would have taken £20 off with alacrity.

"I will write you a cheque," he observed. "After all, I shall be careful not to injure her and can always sell her again." But a letter in his pocket recalled his wrongs. "What I do object to is having a horse I can do nothing with," he burst out. "The Crimson Rambler, I have no doubt, would carry me here most excellently."

"But he can't jump," said Standish, amazed.

"He could go on the roads," said Acland peevishly. "His keep is a positive drain upon my resources the whole affair was a most hideous mistake."

Standish said it was a bad thing to be poor.

then called forth Tom, consulting him as to a second horse for Acland's use.

The Englishman's protests were cut short by a sarcastic inquiry as to whether he meant to do three days a week on one, and Tom considered it.

"There's the grey cob, sir, quiet and gentle, but she refuses her fences and wants driving over them. Apt entirely to put you in on your head in a wather-trinch."

Acland, who was about to plead for the grey cob, now refrained.

"An' the bay Hardgo colt, sir; but sure, he'd pull the arms from you for a mile or two."

"If I must have a second horse," said Acland, "and thought I could ever manage him, I should like"—here he blushed at his own audacity—"the Holy Robin—the chestnut—"

Tom burst into fervent promises of Robin's docileness. He'd engage to make him that gintale an' aisy that a man could shave above on his back. He'd wallop the buck-jumps from him, and tie up his head, and tache him to go in a circle, and countless other things.

Standish fingered his black moustache doubtfully.

"I don't want to hurt you, Sandy," he said—"and the horse is young. Still, Tom can do a lot, and if you like him, take the two for £100—the price of one horse—not a figure I'd take from a stranger, I can tell you—"

Strictly true, for his highest offer at the show for the chestnut had been £20, as he knew the mare was not marketable. Still the statement pleased Acland, and was no lie.

"And as for his hocks, they'll never come against him," he added.

"Do you mean by his hocks," queried Acland, "the knee-joints of his back legs there with the marks upon them?"

"I—oh, exactly," said Standish, and Tom murmuring "God save us alive!—knee-joints," fled away with Blackbird.

"And they," Sandy went to the other stables, "are they likely to give way?"

"I don't really believe they will, Sandy," said Standish, honestly. "I think it's conformation."

The only thing this implied to Acland was Bishops, so he let it alone. Phillips bore down with milk and soda, and listened with interest to the account of purchases.

"Very nice horse, Holy Robin, sir," he observed; "exceedingly taking—threw the boy three times at exercise yesterday. No doubt fresh after the show, sir. Is now to bed; that is, Jimmy, the boy, sir. Ellie has just taken him tea. And Blackbird—the black mare with unusual legs, sir. Quite an aviary, sir."

Here Acland, disturbed by the accounts of Robin's vagaries, desired Phillips to curb his leaning towards wit.

"Certainly, sir—thank you, sir," said Phillips, as he took the tumbler and left.

He watched Robin tied up and strapped down, being walked about the paddock, and remembered that he was asked to Castleknock to see the new horses and help to school them. Having mounted the grey cob, a particularly lazy animal, which stumbled as it went, he rode over there, with a trustfully loose rein.

The big yard where he had encountered the bailiff seemed to overflow with horses, Nora and Evie

darting about among them, buckling straps and adjusting bridles; various long-tailed animals starting about nervously in response. When the fat cob was housed, the horses resolved themselves into three, all very youthful and skittish.

They set forth, the groom leading one, Nora another, Evie taking a light-middled grey mare with a wild eye, and Acland discovering with tempered pleasure that he was expected to use the whip to all three.

As they walked fast up the narrow back avenue, he listened patiently to a flood of terms conveying nothing to him: of fine hocks and great shoulders; good bone and bad; jumping quarters, quality and substance. The shapes of the three youngsters were discussed with a slurring of bad points, and hailing of good, and a constant urging to the bewildered man to run from one horse to another, and say what he thought. Being wiser than usual he said nothing, and was therefore hailed as a reticent judge.

Nora's two were really fine animals; the class which cost, and run to money; but even his untutored eye noted the slim waist of Evie's mare, and her head and eyes.

"Bought her from under a cart," said Evie. "Oh, do mind, Sandy. Sandow may kick. She's full of breeding; her mother was a thoroughbred and won races. Oh, I've been saving for months, and I had to give him an old set of harness even now to make up, but she'll just fly."

Acland, dodging a sudden dash of the grey's heels, said he feared she was not very robust—he meant not up to weight, but failed to express it.

Evie said indignantly that the mare would eat a bin, and they left the road. The sun glinted hotly

and the rushy pasture was long. Sandy breathed a thanksgiving when they reached a low, broad bank, and the schooling began. Nora's two took to it kindly. After one snort of dismay, they jumped and jumped again easily and lightly. Not so Dawn the grey. She sidled and plunged and fretted, snatched mouthfuls of grass off the bank, and finally, answering the whip, bundled into the ditch with a snort of temper. Finding it cold she came out . . . on the side she had gone in at.

"She's nervous," said Evie, straining on the rope.

"I think she is exceedingly ill-tempered," said the now perspiring Sandy, as he pranced with his whip, avoiding the lashing heels.

Evie considered the matter, and decided that Sandy was no use with the whip. A moment later he found himself at the end of the long rope, and felt suddenly for those fishes at Dooloch. He dangled, sore-handed, the mare using him at her pleasure. Up and down, short rushes and long; shrieked at by Evie, who flailed without ceasing, to keep a strain on, until suddenly the mare plunged backwards. The sudden jerk flung Sandy down . . . the rope paid out red-hot, but he reefed it and would not let go, the fervour of a brave despair animating him. There was a rush blinded progress on his face, and then—the ditch. It was deep and moist, and he took it head foremost. The rope slacked, there was a yell—a thud—and as Sandy thrust up his bramble-crowned head, his appalled eyes were greeted by the grey filly crouched just above him, her sliding, unwilling hoofs within an inch of his face. His shriek of horror hurried matters: she rose with a snort of terror, and fortunately cleared him. Then,

black with sweat and trembling with rage, she stood in the far field.

Sandy scrambled out, conscious now that Nora Hartland, overcome by laughter, was leaning weakly against one of the colts, and that Edmund Graves, with a stick, was apparently the immediate cause of the mare's sudden obedience.

"Wasn't that splendid? We made her," said Evie, clearing the deep ditch with an easy spring.

Mr. Acland, as he picked out a few thorns, inquired, with some natural asperity, what would have happened if the mare had jumped into instead of over the ditch.

"I might exceedingly easily have been killed," he observed, as he lay down to look for his cap.

Nora Hartland decided that he very easily might, and rated her step-sister for her wild behaviour. But Evie was unabashed.

"Not let her jump," she said, wide-eyed, "when Sir Edmund just turned up with a big stick, and fetched her a smack on the shoulder, that fairly cowed her. Why, I'd have been mad not to hunt her on with that chance."

The remainder of the school lacked variety. The grey mare curtsied and sulked. Evie tugged, and the men smote at every fence until the lesson was over, and even the owner felt damped. Dawn was too clearly the owner of an nasty temper. She took narrow banks on her chest, and wide banks on her tummy; reduced the only wall they met to ruin, and came home, knocked up and exhausted, eyeing them with unalloyed spite.

The two horses, now named respectively Sandow and Killtown—the latter from its birthplace—were cool and undisturbed; the mare dripped as she

walked ; so, in fact, unused to violent exercise, did Sandy Acland. He thought, with a gentle sigh of regret, of his usual holiday at Folkestone, his decorous walks upon the breezy Leas, his conversations with brother Londoners as to the future of cotton or sugar—and the appalling mismanagement of the Government. His tea at shops or winter-gardens ; over-long dinners and rubber of Bridge, or second stroll upon the Leas. But that was England and past life, and this . . . this tramping across fields, this clumping, pushed aside by young horses, up a narrow back avenue, this bramble-pricked return was now—Ireland—and he was not sure that he had known life before. He resented and disliked it ; his mental balance was upset ; yet he recognised some unseen force which dragged his mind to these new grooves, and made him cease to wonder at what happened.

If Mr. Jones, his immaculate head clerk, could have seen him as he slid into that ditch—could have felt that pungeest moment when the grey mare crouched so close to him ! He fell back to Nora as they came close to the road. Ireland makes light of years ; pink-cheeked and smiling, she not only looked young, but was young. After all, there are some people who do not count age by their birthdays. There are young men who never know youth, and old men who never know age, but go smiling out across the border with a boy's enthusiasm fresh in them.

"Do you remember"—Nora pointed backwards to the road—"your ride upon the chestnut ?"

Sandy shuddered. He did not think he was ever likely to forget it.

"That chestnut saved me," she laughed. "I knew

he would, and you saved him for me. You know"—her eyes grew grave—"if he had gone I could not have hunted; I should have existed here in a state of semi-starvation. For if I could not make some little show of riches, everyone would want to be paid."

"You are very plucky," he said gently. He would have substituted foolish a month before.

"Oh, pull the devil's tail without daring to let go. Eternal striving. Eternal contriving. Small sops to many varieties of shop-keeping cerberus. Oh, yes, but"—the golden sunshine picked out silver threads in her soft hair—"but sometimes, Sandy— Oh! I know it's my life, and I must go on; I could not rust. Sometimes one gets tired and worse—lonely."

He said nothing, looking at her with a new sympathy.

"Evie will marry soon. People say I've done her heaps of harm keeping her here in this vagabond house and life of mine. She has a little money, and might have stayed with her father's people. But she likes it, and I am content. I want her to be rich; I want her to be happy; they don't always go together. That light heart of hers will never suit Castletown-Graves, and the title of 'My Lady.' He'll tyrannise and weary her, and—I can't stop it."

Sandy, braving a snub, asked her suddenly why she had never married.

"Because—no one tempted me." She met his eyes with a curious look. "Long ago there was someone, but no money—no possibility—so it dropped, and afterwards my few offers failed to please me. My troubles are my own; I've never felt inclined to sandwich them with other people's—to take up the burden of someone else's life and

rear the children of some unloved man. So here I am—a soured old spinster—and sometimes—I'm sorry. Common interests must draw one together. Age has made me romantic and long for a helping hand as I clamber downwards. We can run uphill alone, in the sunlight . . . making daisy chains, eating fruit, playing thoughtlessly . . . but on the shady side the daisy's dead, the trees bare; that certain gulf of oblivion at the bottom; limbs growing tired and brains weary, we long for companionship—for a pal, a lover and comrade rolled into one, instead of the Sir Galahads and Lancelots we once dreamt of. Someone simple and human; perfect because it was our own. Idle dreams, Sandy, and hopeless ones; but better to have the right to dream than to be chained. My goodness!" she cried, with that sudden change of voice and manner which is so essentially Irish, "there's Teddy in difficulties with that mare. I'll bet—I'll bet"—half to herself—"he won't hold on."

The grey mare, much soured, had suddenly swerved, her thin nerves upset by the dogs. Sir Edmund was leading her. He yelled, and the dogs barked, and in a moment the grey was free, and the swearing baronet rubbing his hand. The filly was caught again speedily, stabled with evil words; but no one gave Graves sympathy for his reddened palm. In fact, all that Nora Hartland said was: "You'd never have gone into that ditch;" and . . . Acland enjoyed his tea. He felt that the bramble scratches were atoned for. Evie waited on him, and smiled at him until his brain swam with a wonder which was almost wistful. Despite Graves' black looks, she followed him to the door, when the unwilling grey cob came round.

"If you'll be in to-morrow, I'll ride over. We—might—walk down to the loch. You know the little lake. It's so pretty there."

The little man, blushing, was sure that he would be in.

"Oh!" Evie pulled out a crumpled letter. "Yes, I'm so glad—I'll be over early." She was very breathless. "And— Oh! would you post that? It's too late now here."

She thrust a letter into his hand and fled, but Nora came with him to the gate.

"What a lecture I read you," she said. "You see we are able to look down into the shadow now—both you and I. Good-bye."

The letter was addressed to Neill Ievers, Esq., in an uneducated hand, which was certainly not Evie's.

Possibly from the groom about a horse, thought obtuse Sandy Acland, as he rode homewards.

CHAPTER X

A WALK BY A LAKE AND AN UNDOUBTED THEFT

"If she grow suddenly gracious,
Reflect is it all for thee."

—KIPLING.

THE lake Evie spoke of lay about three miles from Ballymacshane, a streak of grey water, rush-fringed, crouched low amid surrounding hills. A ruined castle, bleak and bare, hung over it, telling of the days when a way had lain along Loch Neen's edge and the robbers had exacted toll on all who passed. There was no other road then to the ford of the river. It was not much to see, though beautiful, as all Ireland is, with its softness of colouring and gentle companionable loneliness. There were no houses there; nothing but grazing cattle and sheep and the rustle of the wind among the bushes. Little clouds busied themselves on a blue sky, their softness reflected in the still waters. It was hot for early September, and Acland asked diffidently for the woolly Iceland pony, and felt glad because Standish was away. The girl had arrived early, radiant in white, and they departed, Acland seeing a halo of romance and youth round the Iceland's shaggy ears. Evie was strangely silent; she seemed to take an unusual interest in the beauty of the landscape, and

to look through space into some misty futurity as they drove quietly along. They left the pony grazing on someone's field and descended to the edge of the water. It was very pretty and peaceful and still, but somehow seemed scarcely worth a three-mile drive to see. To the right a stretch of woods, the edge of the Ievers' home, Droveen. Evie Hartland had come to see the lake, but she now gazed across its waters and focussed her eyes on the trees. Then she sighed, blushed, suddenly got up, and directing Acland to unpack the basket, said she would take a walk, and Catty the dog went with her.

Acland laid out several varieties of sandwiches and a cake and awaited her return. When he looked round the girl had disappeared from view.

The wind whispered in the rushes, the waters rippled under a faint breeze; but the early September sun was exceedingly hot, and the ground was hard. Presently the little man commenced to get tired of it; this was not the picnic of his dreams. The treeless expanse of ground was void of life—four cows and some sheep excepted. He walked along calling, made careful search behind several high stones, wondering if Evie had fallen asleep, and at last uneasily, if some accident could have befallen her. Could she have slipped through the rushes and walked deliberately into those placid waters? Common-sense declared it impossible; yet cold chills of uneasiness ran races down his spine, and he darted through an old arched door into the castle. Here he found winding and decrepit stone stairs and heard voices. He toiled upwards with difficulty, for the steps wound round and round and were broken in many places, and finally emerged breathless upon the flat and still perfect top. Here, on the low

wall, sheltered by a buttress, lichens tinting its greyness, sat Evie and Neill levers, deep in conversation.

They watched him emerge with consternation. Evie jumped up.

"I— Oh, I'm so sorry," she explained hastily. "I came up the old castle, and found Neill here, and I began to talk. I've kept you waiting."

Mr. Acland, thinking of the pangs of anxiety he had suffered, said that she undoubtedly had. He could not in the least understand how they had failed to hear him call; but he looked at them without suspicion.

Neill went down for the luncheon. Evie, after a moment, dreaded that he could not carry it by himself and insisted on Sandy's resting; so he was again left alone. He looked round the square of solid stonework, with its loopholes and buttresses, peered down the broken stairway into strange, dungeon-like rooms, with slits for windows, and thought of what life must have been on that cramped place. Two rooms, no doubt; one on the ground, one above, and these little holes where a man could not lie down; winds whistling through the slits, and the rough robbers watching like human spiders for their prey. They had lived and loved and died, savages as they were, but their castle remained, and the stone rooms which had echoed to the oaths of the pillagers and groans of the pillaged was now peered into by modern men and women; products of the nineteenth century which did its robbing so differently. He thought of the robbers' astonishment if they woke up, and trooping to the roof, saw him sitting there. The country teemed with these old castles, some of them big places with moat and courtyards, and

nearly all half battered away by Cromwell's soldiers—wild times of old in this fair, green land. Sandy Acland suddenly remembered that he was hungry, and that half an hour is an indecorously long time for two people to take to walk two hundred yards and fetch some sandwiches. He was peering over the wall when he heard them climbing up. Evie's face appeared through the little door.

"It was all my fault," she said penitently. "You see, Catty went off to the rushes and left me. Now she's eaten all the cake and most of the sandwiches—indeed, the bottle of milk and the soda-water . . ."

"Is just about all we've got," finished Neill cheerfully, as he laid these items down. "There are two packets of sandwiches, but—"

The two packets were rather draggled—in fact, no one seemed to want them—and when Catty laid her beautiful, unrepentant head on the warm stones and thumped her wet, silken-fringed tail, she received the remainder; which was not justice. There were still some pears in the basket, so matters might have been worse.

When these were eaten they went down. Catty retreated herself into the rushes swishing up and down. Evie and Neill found a dungeon which only held two, and Sandy Acland, sitting on a very hard stone in the sunshine, decided that picnics were a mistake. He preferred luncheon at home. Of course, if an unfortunate accident had not produced Neill Ievers, it would have been different. As the two came into the sunshine he was looking thoughtful.

"Such a fascinating, dear dungeon," Evie remarked, with all youth's callousness. "Where they shut the people up—no light, and a narrow door to go in by. You really must see it, Sandy."

Acland rose.

"We'll wait for you," said Evie, sitting down.

Acland returned to his stone, deliberately observing that he might lose his way. He did not get up again when Neill good-naturedly said he would take him there. The little man was becoming soured by circumstances.

Neill, who had to be home for tea, suggested a stroll towards Droveen, to keep him company; so they walked round the narrow lake and up some fields which bordered the woods. Here Neill left them, with a last expression of surprise at having found them by the lake. A narrow country road divided the fields from the trees, which branched coolly, flinging chequered shadows on the mossy ground.

Evie, leaning on the low wall, told Acland that they were quite close to Droveen.

"You can see the stables," she said, pointing. "They're a quarter of a mile from the house. It's a great big place, only half kept up, of course, with as much outward show as they can manage, and very little behind it. They're really rather poor; even when Neill's uncle dies it will only be another large house and no extra money."

Acland remarked that Ireland was a strange country, where people, who would have had a modest villa and a bicycle in England, here, on the same income, occupied country mansions and kept hunters.

"There," said Evie tragically, "Catty's got in after the rabbits."

Catty was sweeping her handsome red person up and down the glade in hot pursuit of flying bunnies. She was exceedingly deaf when they called her, and

pursuit being hopeless, they could only wait until she was tired.

"A nice look-out for me if the keepers come along," said Evie anxiously. "I hope you've got some money, Sandy."

"What for?"

"Why, to pay them to be quiet, of course, and if it's Cripps, the head man, it will mean five shillings."

Acland immediately scrambled into the wood, upsetting a good deal of the wall on to the road, and gave a futile chase for a breathless five minutes, to Catty's secret amusement. He returned, much irritated, to the road, and was just getting out when a trap, driven at a furious pace, dashed round the corner. The horse, which was blowing, came suddenly upon the displaced stones, stumbled and fell, struggling up again with a bleeding knee, and limping painfully.

"Now we've done it," cried Nora Hartland, jumping out. "He's done for; it's Mikey Harly's old pony, and his knees don't matter, they've been down before, but he's strained himself. Who on earth put stones there? and I must get on. I must. It's old Molly Bennett, Evie, in a fit, and I was going for the doctor. She'll be dead if he's not there in an hour."

At this Evie became distracted. She wailed round the injured horse and upbraided Sandy. It appeared to be an important matter, and that Molly Bennett was a family friend, one time nurse to both girls. That she must not, could not, be allowed to die, and yet how were they to bring help. The placid, lazy Iceland pony was two miles away. Nora sniffed and Evie railed, until

Catty, thinking it more exciting than rabbits, came up to look on.

"What about—the levers?" queried Sandy nervously.

A sudden flare of determination lit Evie's eyes.

"They never would, but they must," she breathed. "I'll get something there from the coachman and bring it back. I'll put it into this trap. Come, Sandy—" and in a second she was tearing through the cool shadows towards a square block of buildings a short distance away—Acland trotting breathlessly by her side—feeling certain that it would prove even more expensive than Catty and the keepers.

But as they ran in through the open gate, silence greeted them; calls brought no answer. The wide, square yard lay quiet under the golden sunlight, late roses pink against the mellow walls. Rows of blistered doors stood open, but no horses looked out. Evie groaned; Carthy was away, she dare not go to the house. She darted from stable to stable, suddenly crying out as a grey-white blazed head peered from one and contemplated the invaders sleepily. The horse backed, snorting as his door was flung open. Then, in a tangle of hopeless remonstrance, Acland found himself plundering an untidy harness-room, returning with an old bridle, and helping to lead a grey colt out into the yard. The animal was exceedingly young, with the clean, unblemished legs of an unworked horse and a long, unkempt coat.

Sandy Acland almost raved, very nearly wept as the adventure proceeded. To take another man's horse, "to steal, to—" but he found himself running beside Evie as the grey ambled across the yard, for the girl took no notice of him.

The colt was exceedingly amiable; he allowed

himself to be led over the field and through the wood, and reduced the gap to deeper ruins with childlike good-temper.

"They've given you a horse. Oh, how splendid!" Nora darted forward with the collar in her hands.

Acland remarked between set teeth that they had been given nothing, but no one listened; the still docile grey was adorned with the pony's harness.

"It is even possible," clamoured Acland, as he was told to adjust the crupper, and stood staring at the long grey tail, "that the animal has never been in harness."

Evie said that he would never learn younger; she was busying herself with string and a broken trace. Then, as Acland endeavoured to his work the grey showed his first spirit; feeling his tail gently pulled, he promptly kicked, "hoisting," donkey-fashion, upsetting the astonished Acland on to the heap of stones. Nora came to the crupper and said Sandy was clumsy. There was no respite, a moment later the harness was adjusted and the low trap pulled up to the colt. It was a full size too small, scraping his shaggy sides and swinging close to his long tail.

"Sandy will go with you," said Nora. "I'll take the pony back."

With a positive qualm of horror but ashamed to resist, Sandy got in; they sat on steep cushions, looking up at a dusty back. The colt stood quietly, showing no inclination to move. A gentle chuck elected no response; Nora tugged at the bridle, and he slobbered and blew out over her sleeve with childish friendliness. Precious time flew. Nora set her mouth grimly; jumping for a branch, she broke one off.

"We'll beat him," she said calmly. "Sit still."

Whack came the knobly stick upon the shaggy sides. The grey neither plunged nor kicked, but he fled from the pain ; found the suddenness of what dangled at his heels, and hoping he could leave it, broke into a gallop and bolted.

"That's all right," cried Nora cheerily. "Don't pull at the reins, Evie ; they're rotten."

The road was narrow and winding, skirting Droveen wall. They tore along it madly, the trap swinging, Acland remonstrating, dust flying in clouds. They hovered over ditches, grazed heaps of stones, and once induced an old woman to plunge off her donkey-cart, and invoke all female saints to aid her.

Evie sat still, giving her mind to mere guidance—never attempting to pull hard on the mended reins. The colt showed endurance ; he dashed on, hating the horror at his heels ; they passed wide iron gates, and got on to a broad, flat road ; the grey was slackening speed, and Evie had happily remarked that he was now trained, when they observed a car coming soberly to meet them.

Evie looked.

"Mrs. Ievers !" she cried. "Hide me ! Oh Sandy, hide me—"

Acland offered his straw hat hopelessly. The bottom of the trap was too narrow to hold a child : the colt had come to a lurching, frightened trot, and showed signs of stopping. Desperation spurs intellect. Evie wore thin, high-heeled shoes ; she tore one off, and standing up, dealt the astounded horse a series of sound blows with the heel, so that he dashed on again, blowing loudly, getting from side to side of the road in perilous fashion. He was now black with sweat, and not immediately to be recognised as grey. They bore down on the car at

racing pace ; caught a glimpse of Mrs. Ievers' face set in outraged protest, of Graves' thin legs flying heavenward as they jarred the step, and heard a "Glory be" from the astonished Carthy—then they were past—unrecognised—Evie unaware that in her agitation she had continued to hammer the colt with her brown shoe.

Murmuring "Thank Heaven!" she sat down, giving the shoe to Sandy, and endeavouring to put his hat on her foot.

"Oh, if they'd known him," she said, "I should have gone back to the lake and drowned myself."

The colt now commenced to sidle and stop, and would probably have smashed the trap if help had not arrived. They were debating the chances of turning a corner, when fate ordained that Dr. Holmes himself should appear upon the way, driving his high dog-cart. Evie stopped the blown youngster, and flung herself incoherently upon the Doctor, babbling her tale of sickness and adventure. She then put her foot on to the step, and began to climb up.

"But—what am *I* to do?" cried Acland, from the grey colt's head.

"You—I must get to see poor nurse. Oh, you—take the straps off, and leave them there in the trap—they'll be quite safe—and then lead the horse to the wood and wait for me; we'll try to slip him back."

"Good—good—God!" said Mr. Acland heavily.

He was left alone on the country roads with a stolen grey horse; with the task of removing that frightened animal from the trap; and further, of walking with him back to the wood, and there being

probably discovered by some keeper or servant of the Ievers', and held up to public disgrace.

Evie waved him a smiling callous farewell; and when she was represented by a blur of dust he, with resignation, commenced to pick at the buckle of the harness, receiving an unlooked-for shock as the brass part slipped with a clang to his feet, and the grey horse plunged away on to the grass, trying to bolt. It is at all times difficult to stand at a horse's head and unharness him at one and the same time; it is, in fact, rather impossible, and, to any novice, the removal of harness is far from simple. Acland felt a growing admiration for the race of grooms, as he picked and pulled and hacked with his penknife at knotted strings and rusty buckles. Finally, believing that he had undone the traces, he seized the colt by the head and endeavoured to lead it out, that now outraged animal coming with a snort of fear. Unfortunately, having overlooked the final securing of the trace with thick string, the unfortunate grey found himself still attached, and trap, horse, and man resolved themselves into a complicated merry-go-round. Just as Acland, clinging to the bridle, was about to give it up, the patched shaft did so instead, dangling at the colt's side, slapping him in the ribs; while the trap fell with a clang on to the road. This simplified matters; the rest, with the aid of the penknife, was fairly plain sailing, so that at last the broken trap lay supine upon the road, covered with a tangle of odd harness, and an astonished, grimy, resigned Londoner found himself tramping along a dusty road, leading the grey colt homewards. As he went he looked back, wondering at a land where men get shot at from behind hedges, yet a set of badly-

mended harness may be left unprotected with complete safety.

Acland trudged and fumed, starting at every sound. The horror of discovery peeped at him from the dusty thorns; there was agony in a distant rumble of wheels; in the sound of voices from the fields. . . . To the day of his death the little man would not forget the creeping fear running down his backbone as he tore at a jog-trot past the iron gates of Droveen . . . his guilty flush and subsequent relief when he met two workmen, who passed him without comment. They might have known the horses; might have asked questions . . . and he knew he possessed no Irish resource; no mastery of graceful untruths to meet them with.

It was something to find himself under the shelter of the high wall, away from those gaping gates; he went more easily, with less fear of Mrs. Ievers descending upon him, and it was more than something to see Evie, accompanied by a boy with a dog, coming to meet him. Now, at least, he possessed companions in crime.

Evie, who showed no sympathy, merely reproached him for his delay.

"You were quite a long time," she said severely. "How could you have taken such ages to slip off the harness? Mikey is going on now to fetch it and the trap."

Acland—with some pleasure—explained that that harness now lacked most of its string adjuncts, and that the shaft was broken. He resigned the colt's bridle, and wiped his heated forehead. Mikey received the news of the broken shaft with a total lack of emotion. He said "wishah" now, and suggested the return of the grey without further

delay. There was no cessation of incident; many things were still to come. The grey horse was led over the ruins into the wood, Mikey, who had let his donkey go, went on to reconnoitre. There was a convenient rick of hay near the stable gates, and the colt was got to this unobserved. Here he remained contentedly eating, while Mikey scouted. He returned, flushed with excitement, to announce that "Misther Calty was just running back the cyar, and would surely be away to his tay in a minnit."

Now, it lacks allurements for a law-abiding British subject (who would trundle his bicycle after lighting-up hour, if he had not got a match) to find himself skulking behind a hay-stack, holding a stolen horse. Acland held the reins, and heard the colt chump hay until the grinding got on his strained nerves. Evie peered from the side, and watched feverishly for the approach of keepers.

"And if anyone does appear?" said Sandy.

"We must just loose the strap and let him go," she breathed. "We can slip round the rick and into the wood—they mayn't see us."

Mr. Acland lacked speech to make answer in—so simple did this sound to town-bred, well-ordered ears.

But Mikey returned breathless. Carthy was away to the big house for his tea, and advance might be made. Mikey went alone. He announced his intention of saying he found the colt straying, should discovery fall upon him. There was a breathless five minutes, and the hasty return of Mikey with the bridle, announcing complete success.

"Divil a sight of a sowl," he said! "so I strolled in an' left him, an' signs by, Miss Evie, the feet is fair wcre from him."

Evie gasped—of course, the colt was unshod—she

thought of that thudding gallop on the hard road. Mikey, who was absent of mind, kept the bridle as a memento.

Now Mrs. Bennett recovered, and the Hartlands, relieved from anxiety, met Mrs. Ievers and her son next day at a local garden-party. The great lady, who was much perturbed, stopped to speak to them.

"Absolutely the most extraordinary thing," she burst out. "Mr. Ievers' grey four-year-old, brought in two days ago, was found in his stable last night very hot and quite lame; his feet absolutely hacked to pieces. Yet Carthy knows that the horse never left the stable-yard; yet he looked as if he had been galloped."

Mr. Acland observed moodily that nothing was strange in Ireland. "Perhaps the horse *had* been galloped."

"Absolutely impossible!" decided Mrs. Ievers. "He was not out." She turned to Evie, inquiring what manner of animal they had met her driving yesterday in such perilous fashion. "Beating it with your shoe," she said, with shocked playfulness—"a new purchase, perhaps?"

"Oh, no," said Evie, very meekly; "it was one—I—borrowed for the afternoon."

Here Neill caught her eye, and truth dawned on him. They retreated to a shady corner, and judging by his unbridled laughter he found confession amusing.

But to this day Mrs. Ievers tells the mysterious story of her husband's grey colt.

CHAPTER XI

A FIRST DAY'S HUNTING

"In the strife, when all courage is tested, and power—
From the meet on the hill-side, the horn-blast, the find."
—GORDON

THE training of Holy Robin was being proceeded with. Tom most honestly endeavouring to reduce the youngster to the lamb-like state he had pledged himself to ; but health, high spirits, and good old oats were things to be reckoned with. Robin was a very handsome horse ; his new owner eyed him with complete approval. His satiny coat, well-set-on head and tail, were things to charm the novice's eye. He even trusted himself upon the youngster's back in the paddock, with the safeguard of side reins attached to the saddle, and Tom pacing near, Robin conducting himself with great gravity and decorum. Acland also attended sundry expeditions, during which the chestnut, in company with other aspirants to fame, curtsied and ducked before big banks, or took them with an eagerness which elicited a "Good, begob! his heart's befour him," from the enthusiastic Tom.

They came and went ; but every fresh horse was a treasure to the groom.

The Robin's heart seemed almost too far "befour him" to suit its owner. He chased it over narrow banks with a fervency which was not reassuring, honouring them with perfunctory flips of his heels, and exceedingly often falling down. Acland shuddered at the idea of riding such an animal, though assured by Tom that "the bigger they'd lep, the safer they'd lep, and he'd rather see a horse fall the right side than to make a nesht on any fince." The Englishman made mental reservations as to trying these niceties until Robin should have learnt to keep his heart in his body. To be accurate, he did not want to jump fences at all, and the months before the hunting had passed easily for him. Standish was one of those men who care little for schooling, and Acland's complete ignorance passed unnoticed. He rode forth on Blackbird, but kept to the road or one of the big fields near the house, where he could canter gently. There was, of course, cub-hunting, an unearthly performance in the early dawning, which Acland quite refused to attend, and then the opening meet drew nigh and was upon them. To Standish it seemed natural that all men must know how to ride; he did not approve of Sandy's seat, but knew well enough that many men who look badly go hard, and had scarcely an idea that he took forth a novice to his virgin-chase.

Acland had bought his hunting kit with due economy. There were, he knew, extravagant people, who exhibited sundry paper legs labelled "Duke of Dash," and "Marquis of Carbas," and other great men who made coats for the lights of the hunting-fields. Acland passed them by, shrugging his shoulders at specialities, and went instead to Day Brothers, who also scoffed at the

places of repute, and promised him an entire outfit for little more than a coat would have cost him if he had paid for a name.

They had looked exceedingly well, he thought, as he sat upon a saddle in the fitting-room. He was justly proud of them, and saw them laid out upon a chair in the early morning with a smile; the meet was no distance off, and Standish appeared to have been up since the dawn. Once on, they became doubtful. He knew something was not exactly right; his tie, despite Phillips efforts, resolved itself into a white dumpling. He lost his temper over his boots, which hurt his insteps and bagged about his legs, and went down, disliking hunting. Standish, in well-worn pink, was eating hurriedly. He advised just a few boiled eggs as the best things in the world to hunt on, and then looked Sandy up and down.

Acland went to get some bacon, and was uneasily conscious of the scrutiny.

"Very nice, aren't they?" he said. "Mere nonsense paying for a name. I assure you, Standish, by going to Day Brothers for everything, I saved at least six pounds."

Standish said drily that it looked as if he had, and took his four eggs sadly; like many thin men, he was a big breakfaster. He was quite good-looking in his pink: his habitual mournfulness almost in abeyance.

"The brown mare will put me down," he said pleasantly. "Nothing but the devil and a few falls will make the fool change on her banks."

Acland immediately shivered: he had forgotten the fences. Miss Susie, who was attached to him, immediately prescribed camphor dropped upon a

lump of sugar, and despite remonstrances, went to get it.

"And there are some nice razor-tops," went on Standish, growing even happier. "Things to put an old horse down, let alone a mad four-year-old. I tell you, Sandy, you're well off on a mare like Blackbird; there's not much that will stop her."

Acland shivered again . . . most unfortunately just as Miss Susie came in, and he was quite unable to escape the camphor. He ate it grittily, Standish stamping at the door, and got into his coat with a horrid sensation of burning inside him. Grains of camphory sugar disturbed his peace for some miles.

A new cob was in the shafts, and they sped forward rapidly, Standish explaining that he kept the bay for nearer meets when they had time to be late. Sandy, his words tasting of camphor, replied that he thought he would ride the short distances. The clouds lay low and grey, veiling the mountain-crests; the wind, moisture-laden, blew softly across them. Hedges were still russet and red with unfallen leaves, lush grass clinging to their banks, late berries purpling on long stalks. Standish, pointing to them, said the country would be blind as jealousy, and seemed to be pleased at the prospect.

They turned to the left through the hills; looking down on a perfect valley, stretching unbroken to a long belt of trees, two rivers creeping silver across it. There were patches of bog and pools of water, but scarcely a field of plough scarring the green; gentle rise and fall of grassland, fenced with banks and walls—a fox-hunter's dreamland: nothing to stop hounds or horses.

Acland sat silent: the excitement which the novelty of the start had conjured up died as he studied the lines of fences. He certainly did not mean to jump, but . . . supposing in going along there was something unavoidable . . . what would happen? Would he remain upon Blackbird's back, or strike the ground with a thud? He shuddered once more, causing Standish to remark that Susie was right and Sandy was breeding a cold. They trotted fast down the long slope, high banks at either side, the scene in days to come of an adventurous moonrise. There were signs of the chase . . . led horses; other traps . . . which they reached and passed.

"He can go." Standish flicked the roan's back. "I got him very cheap, because I hear if he meets a motor, he jumps the fence. He came from Galway, where it's mostly walls, and I thought if he hurt himself against a few stiff places here he might stop it."

"Oh!" Acland devoured the road with feverish eyes. "And—suppose we—were to meet one?"

Standish measured the high bank with a contented eye.

"He'd never cross that," he said, "unless we happened to hit it at a gap." He added that he presumed Sandy was not nervous.

"Oh, dear, no!" said the little man bitterly, looking at a low wall, with a deep drop outside. "Oh, dear, no! Not in the least."

Standish said that was all right, and passed another trap. They swung out on to a wider road, going at a good ten miles an hour, and then turning in at the gate, reached the meet. Their horses waited for them in the shelter of a low wood, the groom busy polishing with a duster. Higher up,

by a paling, the hounds were grouped; the wide lawn was dotted with horses and traps. Standish got out, and Acland, holding the reins loosely, looked about him. So this was hunting. This mania which held young and old; which made men and women exceed their incomes; go in debt to their tailors, and forsaking all others, cleave unto that and to that only; which is also in the marriage service, but less faithfully kept. This *mêlée* of horses, some unpleasantly fresh; this concourse of human beings; all come out to watch that little crowd of dogs smell out a fox. That was how the London man was reasoning it out dreamily: warm in the shelter of the trees, and wishing that he might remain in the trap all day, seeing it all from there, when Standish roused him.

"You might as well give up day-dreaming, Sandy, and tighten the reins," observed the tall man, as he busied himself with the brown mare's boots, "because Graves' motor is coming across."

Acland ejaculated in sudden terror. Trying to jump out so hurriedly that he caught his foot in the rug and reins, and left the trap on his head, hitting the earth just as the roan reared perfectly straight, and would have bolted if Tom had not caught him. But the swerve tweaked the reins and upset Acland, again, just as he was endeavouring to rise. As the shaken little man reached his feet he smelt petrol, and saw Edmund Graves looking down at him with profound disgust. Both the Hartlands were in the car.

"You might really see to the man," observed Graves audibly, to Standish, who had continued, quite unmoved, to buckle on the felt boots. "At this hour it's indecent."

"On camphor and sugar too," said Standish, quite aloud, and fastening the last strap. "Sandy, I am ashamed of you. Go up to the house for some soda-water."

Some insinuations are almost past bearing. Acland burst into heated but piteous queries as to whether he was supposed to remain in the trap with a begging and restive animal, he having merely hastened to its head, to find his protestations falling on empty air, and to be reminded of the day's pursuits by Tom grasping his leg and ordering him to get up.

The whole cavalcade jogged onwards. Horses squealing and kicking; humping strong backs; old hunters doing it for the fun which they knew of, youngsters for the sheer joy of life which bubbled in their veins. Ahead, as Acland took up Blackbird's reins, he saw Standish sitting carelessly to the brown mare's plunges and Evie Hartland sawing her grey filly's mouth.

"She's apt, sir," said Tom, preparing to mount Holy Robin, "to take hold at her leps."

Sandy Acland breathed a fervent mental prayer that he might do the same, and nodded sapiently, wondering what it meant in a horse. He then rode off, sitting, as Tom remarked, "for all the world like an unaisy sack. An' the masther niver to tell him that the owld mare has a mouth like a stheam-ingin, an' she goin' to hounds. Faix, if he doesn't let her go, she will go," said Tom, adjuring the Robin to be quiet. "Its himself 'll get his sthombach full of leppin' afore night."

Acland rode across the grass to a small gate leading on to the road. Here he was jarred by an unforeseen demand for half-a-crown, which he counted

out in sixpences, unwillingly, while the hunt chafed at his heels.

They jogged along a flat, narrow road, winding between high banks, with such clatter of hoofs and tongues, that Diogenes would have forgotten his tub on this the opening day of the season—that is, if the smutty old gentleman had hunted. The five months lay in front; those five months in which everyone's horses were to carry them perfectly, during which every man meant to come out of covert on the right side, and get that flying start which he had so often missed; in which all the foxes were to run straight, all days to be scenting ones; no water was to wet; no ground to bruise or injure; no slippery bank wrench sensitive tendons; no wall prove hard enough to give big knees.

Acland listened to it all as the people surged about him, and comprehended very little. But he realised that he was strangely elated, and then he came alongside Evie, whose grey was sidling, and reaching at her bit, with ears laid back and tucked-down tail: an illustration of peevishness.

"She— Oh, hold up, Dawn. I'm really afraid she is bad-tempered," said Evie. Then, recovering her small person from the mare's mane. "She tried to bolt just now."

Acland inquired if the mare had ever taken kindly to jumping, and Evie shook a despondent head.

"Oh, she does, sometimes," she said grudgingly. "And of course she'll be all right with hounds. Heaps of young horses funk in cold blood." Here the mare let out, missing Blackbird by an inch. "It would be a hopeless thing for me if she fails and won't jump." The girl used her whip angrily. "I've spent more than I'd got to buy her."

Acland shook his head, and observed that he thought horses were uncertain investments, subject to many fluctuations, and also too much before the public eye. Anything further was cut short by the grey banging him into the hedge, where he got severely scraped.

The little group of pied hounds left the road, turning through a gate into a field. As the crowd of horses commenced to gallop, Acland observed the whip sitting to a jump, and his heart thumped. He rode on very quietly, wondering what it was. Originally a stony gap, it was reduced to ruins before he got there, so he advanced gingerly, and Blackbird fulfilled her character of perfection by walking over.

They were then in the same field as the covert, a little square of gorse enclosed by high banks, and the stranger was privileged to see a pretty sight, but one which puzzled him mightily. Half-a-dozen pink-coated men left their horses and plunged in among the gorse bushes, cracking their whips as they went; the hounds were held back fifty yards away. The little man's eyes grew round.

"I understood," he said to Miss Hartland, "that the dogs were kept to search for the fox. Surely our noses do not scent him so readily."

Standish, close by, brayed suddenly. Nora, after a moment's pause, explained shakily that the covert had been wired round so as to exterminate rabbits, and therefore, though the fox, knowing of it, could break, hounds would probably dash themselves against the wire and stay inside it, so this unusual order was the result.

Acland, who thought that it might have come to his turn to thrust his way through prickly depths,

smiled, allowed Blackbird to eat grass, and began to think fox-hunting was a tranquil pursuit.

"Tally ho!" yelled voices from the gorse. "Go—on—away—!" screeched someone else, and the whole world appeared to go mad. Horses plunged, men shouted; the bevy of human hounds came pouring out, shrieking profanely for their steeds. The master endeavoured to let them mount, and the pack broke away to the shouts in a maddened wave, out through a gap, borne on by the press of horses. Hounds were on it; there was a yelp, a chorus, and they were away on a red-hot scent close on their fox. It was hurry-skurry, tranquillity abandoned. Standish drove his brown mare out to the right, holding her together in an iron grip, sending her along as she tried to plunge. Acland watched dispassionately; he was content to gallop on until he saw an unbroken line of green bank in front, and then he decided to go back to the road through the fields he had come to, and jog along to see what happened. He was much impressed by all the excitement, had even shouted a little himself, crying joyously that the dogs had found the trail; but he had no intention of going on. He pulled at the reins to get round, and . . . found he was mistaken; Blackbird, who had gone easily when her bridle was slack, took this as a sign to take hold and quicken her pace, and did both immediately. The thing upon her strong back rocked and bumped strangely, but she meant to carry it as near hounds as possible. The mare had a mouth like iron when she chose. Acland found that he could in a manner guide her, but she did not mean to stop; she dashed on, straight for that high bank, while his heart pumped like a steam piston, and he used exceedingly bad language. It rose,

high and unbending; his endeavours to turn were now frustrated by horses to right and left, heels in front went up in a sickening fashion, another horse rolled back.

"Great God!" said Alexander Acland, with whimpering wrath, "and I must jump it. I must." He wreathed his hands in the mane. "Great—Oh-h!"

Blackbird dropped to a trot, crouched on her powerful quarters, and rose. Acland rose with her, gripping the mane as the good mare lighted on the bank, next moment, with a sensation of being kicked into the next world they went off. He lost both stirrups in the downward swoop, and grovelled on the beast's neck, praying for help. She shook him back, and strode away, until, with a certain sense of elation, Acland realised that the fence lay behind and he was still upon the back of the animal which had jumped it; moreover, that he was very close to the flying pack.

Uncheckable and untiring, the black mare galloped on; she whistled audibly, but she made no mistakes. She played ball with her hapless rider over two banks and a stone wall before he commenced to sit up and imagine himself a horseman. He had not fallen off or otherwise disgraced himself. He was almost beside the hounds; a glow such as he had never felt before touched the town-bred man's heart. There was something in it, after all; something in this love of following yelping dogs across great and grim obstacles; across other men's lands. The ripple and swing of the mare's muscles filled him with a sense of dual life; the pace, the rush of the air, restored his battered nerves. He sat straight, endeavoured to give up holding by the mane at the next fence. It

was, unfortunately a stick, which Blackbird bucked, and he tried no further novelties, but gripped at anything he could find. Hounds dwelt, foiled by a circling flock of sheep; he puffed breathlessly, looking round him. Standish's brown was plastered with mud, her rider's hat was a wreck. Nora Hartland was close on her new bay, so was Neill Ievers. Graves, several other people he knew nothing of, and the person in the peaked cap, whom he understood was what was known as an M.F.H.

Acland preened himself happily.

"Well done, begob!" said a horseman beside him.

He responded with a gracious smile, and recognising O'Neill's nephew.

"Well done, yer honour. Hadn't ye the courage, an' you flightin' into the air like a snhipe at ivery fince?"

Mr. Acland acknowledged the compliment with some reserve.

"So you're there, Sandy," said Standish, riding up. "Well, isn't the mare a treasure? I told you she couldn't go wrong."

Acland, now beginning to feel a little bruised, remarked that Blackbird had jumped the obstacles most diligently, but he had found it impossible to turn her round at the first one.

"And what would you want to turn her round for?" demanded Standish thunderously. "Is it tail foremost you wanted her to go?"

Hearing this, Acland said nothing further about the road which he had intended to remain on. He lived on his reputation, and trusted that they would go no further. Not so. . . . Old Melody threw her tongue; young Faithful dashed past her; now Pansy had it, now Patience; eager, wistful faces, true noses to the damp ground. A chorus of proclaiming voices

That was it. Their prey had taken this line. They were off again, running hard, and partly because he was lost in the wild country, and partly because he had to, Acland went behind them. The saddle was growing to be such a painful memory of many bumps, that he began to endeavour to balance himself like the man immediately in front of him, with some slight measure of success; in fact, his seat over a bank elicited a cry of "Well sthuck, begob!" from O'Neill's nephew. "Ye'll be on her back yit," he cried, with pleasant conviction. "An' isn't she the great mare entirely with the reins an' yerself flappin' on her."

Acland found breath to snort.

"Sit tight, Sandy, and send her along," called back Standish. "There's a big ditch in front."

The novice's courage ran out speedily. Green fences were bad enough; but water, wide and muddy; with a crisping chill he saw its yellow gleam. Splash into it went the hounds, raising a cloud of spray; sail over it went the master; crash and slosh went a light grey, jumping short. Oh, it was exceedingly wet, and there was no respite. He saw Standish driving the brown at it with a cry and a blow; a too flippant jumper, she took off too soon; landed short and slipped back, Standish scrambling on to the far bank and tugging her up.

"Drive on," counselled O'Neill's nephew. "Glory! but isn't it terrible deep across."

Blackbird "drove on" willingly; but there are occasions when even the best of horses want riding, and this was one of them; she shot out, but staggered on landing. For one sickening moment, Acland, clinging to her mane, saw the muddy swirl of the current close to his left boot . . . then he knew he

was safe upon the bank, but drenched from head to foot by the impact with which the steed of O'Neill's nephew had cloven the waters in the very centre of the river.

"Into a drhy pool she thought he was goin'," said that worthy, as he stood neck-deep. "The raison why, because he ran wild on the bog lasht summer. Bad schran to ye now, git across!"

Acland rode on, a thankful man, and was hailed by Standish . . . there was another slight check . . . to know why the Dickens he had ridden at water with a loose rein, but tempering the reproof by a rider that he had shown his sense in holding on to the mane when the mare lost her legs.

Acland inquired with asperity what else he could hold on to, there being no other long hair in front. They galloped on. They had swung left-handed from Ballin gorse, and were now rounding a humping hill with an old castle perched upon its summit.

Here they checked; hounds seemed hopelessly at fault. There were two points a fox might have run to—Ballyhale Woods to the right, or across a bog beneath them to Garryleck.

Acland drew up in the shelter of a hedge and rested. He was secretly pleased each time the hounds stopped, though, despite his nerves, the feeling of elation had grown as he came. He pulled out his ample packet of sandwiches, and realised that he was too tired to be hungry. Hounds poured through the hedge, circling round him. The little cockney smiled. He considered they were hard-worked and painstaking, so threw them some pieces of bread and meat with endearing words.

"Good little dogs. Nice dogs," said Sandy pleasantly. "Here, boys!"

They snapped at the food. One, Melody, put muddy paws on his boots, reaching up for cold beef.

"You've got such pretty faces," soliloquised Sandy, opening another package.

There was no one upon his side of the hedge except O'Neill's nephew, who, dripping yellowly, watched open-mouthed. Dick Gervase, the master rode down the hedge.

"I thought it might be this way," he said. "He seems to have dropped into the earth. But—" He looked through the hedge. "What the—"

For a moment speech deserted him.

"Good little dogs. Oh! there are too many now. Very hungry, poor fellows," said Acland, flinging small pieces to the gathering crowd.

Then— "What the — are you doing?" he thundered.

"Making friends with your charming dogs," said Sandy graciously, rather flattered by this notice. "They are exceedingly friendly, but also hungry. No doubt if they had overtaken and eaten the fox they—"

Now the master of the Tullow hounds was proverbially good-tempered—too much so, if anything—but when a master of fox hounds, endeavouring to hit off the line, sees his pack enticed with meat and bread from their lawful work, he may reasonably feel annoyed. The flood-gates of his bad language were suddenly raised, and the tide which he let loose upon the head of the surprised Sandy was one which no man need have been ashamed of. By every god and demon he cursed Acland for a knavish fool, a hopeless idiot; for a spoiler of sport, who should never have been born, and having unfortunately

achieved that, should never have left his cradle, save to find a coffin; also cursing in the same breath, which rendered it confusing, Rambler, Reveller, Melody, and Gamble, for having eaten beef sandwiches.

Sandy heard it imperfectly, and moving to the gap, poked his puzzled face through. Gervase having sent one of the whips round, was resting exhausted.

"I beg your pardon," said Sandy mildly, in his clear, precise voice; "but I didn't quite hear. I fear I . . . or the dogs have annoyed you. If you'd kindly explain—"

Here he caught the baleful eyes under the velvet peak, and ceased to speak.

"Explain," said Gervase helplessly, "explain! Did the fellow fall from heaven like manna?"

Self-control deserted the tried master; he rocked on his saddle, laughing helplessly.

Standish, riding up, explained with pain that the offender was his cousin.

"Has he ever"—Gervase wiped his eyes—"ever seen a hunt before?"

"He has never seen anything but the pavements of a town and the poodles in the park," said Standish bitterly, glaring across the hedge.

"Then that explains it," said Gervase, recovering himself. "And I believe that he has lost me my fox. I wasted too much time cursing—while he made friends with my 'dogs'."

He rode off explaining to Standish, who apologised profusely.

Meanwhile, Acland had retreated from the hedge to discuss the matter with O'Neill's nephew.

"He really seemed annoyed," he said, "and the

language—he could not have meant it for me—which he used to the dumb animals was disgraceful.”

“His eyes were leppin’ out of his head with the rage,” said O’Neill’s nephew thoughtfully. “I tell ye, if the thorn bushes wasn’t betune ye, he had a like to strhike ye.”

“If he’s not so sure of his dogs’ affections as to allow others to notice them,” said Sandy sharply, “he had better take to pugs—on strings.”

“Praises be the hivins above me,” said O’Neill’s nephew, overcome. “Himself—an poogs on strings.”

The fox was undoubtedly lost. A forward cast failed; they could do nothing to find the cunning little quarry, who was, had they known it, had turned sharply back and was now half-way to covert. They passed down to the bog, trying uselessly there. Here in this marsh on the edges of brown-hued water, nestling amidst slimy green, people elected to live. It was no man’s land at one time; you paid nothing for your cabin and patch of boggy garden. So the poor work-people braved it, and the strangest little dwelling - places were dotted about. Crooked, crumbling places, sinking in the soft earth; uneven gables; sagging thatched roofs, picturesquely covered with grasses and lichens; rotting walls—houses where a self-respecting English pig might have declined to get ready for his bacony immortality . . . yet happy-faced children peered from the open doors, and the women looked contented. There were one or two places here which it really seemed impossible to regard as habitations. One, a mere hollow cairn, piled up, mud-plastered, with a roof, perhaps six feet across, of thatch, and no chimney. A mad woman had built it herself, Acland was told, and lived there terrorising the bog, always sure of

her toll of meal and potatoes from the poor, who feared her curses.

All this the stranger heard from a friendly native as they slid down the steep incline to the road edging the colony — heard and saw, with wide, almost incredulous eyes, looking across the thickly-housed patch.

Evie Hartland was on waiting for them. Sitting on the dejected, but determined remnants of the grey filly, now black with sweat and white with foam; her light middle reduced to a mere suggestion, but still obstinate. She would not jump.

"I threw her over one small thing, and into another," wailed Evie, recounting her woes. "I've beaten her, and got every man I could to beat her, and rattle stones in a hat at her, and yell at her, and I tried coaxing, and getting off her, and there she stayed. Everything may pass her for all she cares. She won't make a hunter." Evie was young; her lip quivered ominously. "What am I to do?" she went on, as they turned to jog to Ballyhale. "I can't buy another, and I can't leave the roads on this one. It's not hunting."

O'Neill's nephew, who, in the sympathetic manner of the Irish, had listened, now came closer and broke in.

"Is it narves she has, miss?" he inquired. "Maybe if ye were to sphin her down at them—"

Evie, with some show of temper, observed that she had "sphun" the grey three times round one field and then down at a bank—vainly. The mare had checked herself in the last stride.

"I wish to God ye had this one," said O'Neill's nephew, with feeling. "Ye have but to show him a fince, and he makes off for it, and however venturesome he is, he niver'll forget the legs."

On Acland making a remark concerning the river this paragon had jumped into, the youth contemptuously replied that was a mere indiscretion, through being used to drink in a dhry pond at home.

Evie turned gloomy eyes upon the horse—a very good-looking liver chestnut, compact and strong, with a certain amount of breeding, and perfect shoulders. She shook her head.

“Is he a very good jumper?” she asked wistfully.

“Good!” O’Neill’s nephew smote the chestnut upon the neck. “For walls they’re but childer to him, an’ he’s so considerate he makes three halves of ivery bank.”

Evie smiled faintly; Acland, with his small modicum of experience, commenced to do the thing up in his head, and failed.

“An’ I wantin’ but £60 for him,” said O’Neill’s nephew, dropping his voice to the silky persuasive-ness of the seller.

Evie replied that now the grey had turned out so badly, it might as well be six hundred; but she watched the chestnut as he trotted away, and she sighed audibly.

“A winter’s hunting on the roads,” she fumed. “Oh, dear, why haven’t I got £50!”

“£60,” corrected Sandy.

Evie, looking at him in mild surprise, asked if it was the least bit likely that anyone would give what a man asked. That, in horse-dealing, was understood.

“Oh!” Sandy thought uneasily of the cheque he had written out for Standish. “I was not aware of that,” he said. “Fox-hunting”—he wished he had not to meet his saddle so often—“fox-hunting is a very, a very bumping pursuit, Miss Evie.”

Neill Ievers rode up, and Evie plunged afresh into her tale of woe, riding on with him. They turned in at the wide gates of Ballyhale; and though Sandy quite expected to see men descend and thrash their way through the undergrowth, this time it was the hounds; his friends, Rambler, Melody and others, dashing in, spreading and seeking among the laurels. Now and then a foolish puppy yelled "Rabbit, rabbit" shrilly, and then slunk off depressed at the rating voices which checked him.

"I thought," said Sandy, who had got down and stood by his mare's head, "that when hounds barked it meant they had found a fox."

Standish, who had come off to deliver a scolding to his cousin by marriage, bit it off at this guileless remark, and muttered "Holy war" instead. The master, who stood near, commenced a fresh outburst of laughter.

"Like everything in this world, there's a false bark and a true one," said Nora, smiling down at Sandy. "Now, get up! We are going on."

"You see we don't count rabbits as fair game," said Gervase, blowing his horn badly. A sad note, with the echo of good-bye in it. All partings are desolate, even from a square of laurels.

"I have heard, though, of people who made a great deal of money on rabbits," answered Sandy, clambering painfully. "No doubt you can trap and sell a good many in these coverts to help to pay for the expense of keeping so many places for foxes' burrows."

"Co-op hounds," muttered Gervase, showing signs of hysteria. "Oh, look here, Standish! You—what's his name? . . . Acland. Haven't you read books? You might study Jorrocks and not destroy my

wind." His last note on the horn had been a pitiful gurgle.

"But I have," Sandy brightened, and rode on. "Mr. Jorrocks was a grocer, who took a pack of hounds, and always discovered where a fox had gone to by imagining where he would have run to himself. Do you do that?"

"Not sufficient brains. I depend upon my hounds' noses," said Gervase, cantering off.

"You'll be the death of us all, Sandy," said Nora, as the little man met his saddle with a painful reminiscence of many bumps. "But wasn't it splendid, worth everything. I am glad that I owe for oats and everything else when I gallop across country on a good horse. Pain has no part in it. Black care's a tailor and cuts a voluntary at the first fence; the wind laughs at the memory of extravagance, and the summer gleams of common sense. Thrust along! Now they've got it. Here's a narrow bank in front, how will the youngster get over it? . . . Perfectly. He's bold and he's steady; he can jump timber, that was a big stick in the last gap. He only wants a fall or two to make him perfection and worth a fortune. So we go on. Eat eternal rabbits and chickens for dinner. Owe all you can, and pay when you must, but *hunt*, Sandy, and you'll never regret it. Didn't it come home to your very heart as you flew over those fields?"

"Do you know it did," said Sandy, almost diffidently. "It seemed to wake some hitherto unknown sense. If only . . . it had not been . . . so bumpy." He shifted uneasily.

"Oh, you'll learn to sit still, and cut us all down yet," she said cheerily. "And you've got the mare to

do it on. But I do wish poor Evie had been more fortunate. The grey is an impossibility. She won't ride any of mine, afraid of hurting them, poor child. So now, for the sake of a little money, she must lose her five months' fun."

Sandy considered. Hounds were drawing along silently, there was nothing at home. O'Neill's nephew had just larked across one of the sunk fences on the chestnut, and he saw Evie watching. The next moment she tried to follow; the grey plunging away with determined bad temper.

£50. It was a great sum in London: a thing to look at three times; but here mercantile horizons grew misty . . . he thought on, twisting new ideas in his mind.

The day waned to a disappointing end. A fox found by the front gate at Ballyhale got into a hole a mile away. They then drew a gorse covert close by, and finding there, ran twisting round the rock-strewn hills, jumping small fences, hounds hunting on catchy scent, until, finally, he beat them by jumping into a jutting ledge and lying there, looking out anxiously, with hounds at fault within six feet of his hiding-place. The light failed, and Gervase gave it up.

"Stuck within a few feet of us, very likely," he said, looking at the cairns. "The last man who saw him said he was beat, but he can live for another day."

If the small, red brute peering out understood, he must have heaved a sigh of relief, for he had breakfasted heartily on one of Mrs. Anne Cassidy's hens and was exceedingly weary; the questing wave of death had been unpleasantly near as he had tailed up the last slope.

Gervase lived at Ballyhale, and asked them all in to tea. He was an ideal master, a pleasant-faced, persuasive man, who could twist the country people round his finger. Ride up to a glowering, gate shutting farmer, and receive leave in a few minutes' space to gallop horse and all across the owner's bed should he feel so inclined. A thin, dark little man a confirmed bachelor, who cared for nothing but hunting and yachting in summer.

The grey day was closing in. Cloud battalions, answering some bugle-call of storm weather, came marching in unbroken line across the misty sky. The light, woolly-edged cloudlets were swallowed and hidden by bands of violet darkness. The wind moaned; the chill of the coming rain was in the air. The master rode back with Sandy, but the little man, feeling that his expressions were not happy, was reticent, more inclined to question than to answer. Tea, partaken of in the dining-room, with dishes of poached eggs and buttered toast, was not the worst part of the day. The men chattered and laughed, jumping their fences over again; full of the many foxes in one part of the country; of the trapping which made them scarce in another; of one man's sins and another's virtues . . . as they bore on fox-hunting . . . nothing else counts for much. And all, even in abuse, full of tolerant good-nature, except from Graves, who snapped out now and then in some bitter accusation, always with evidence of truth which seemed to take no denial. Telling tales, as if unwillingly, of a fox found in a trap on one man's land as he, Graves, walked through; of a dead cub with shot in him in another's. There was bitterness in his stories, and Sandy noticed how the men grew uncomfortable and passed to something else. It

pleased him, as he dallied with his fourth egg, to think that Sir Edmund was not popular.

"We'll be on the hills by Friday, by you," said Gervase, pouring out tea, and nodding at Standish.

"There are snares upon the hills," said Sandy, taking home-made strawberry jam. "I was coming from Castleknock last week, and just past the four cross-road I was obliged to go into a long wood after Catty, the setter."

"Athgarvan," said Standish.

The table listened attentively. Graves rose to go, calling to the Hartlands. He also spoke suddenly to Sandy, asking how he had enjoyed the day.

"And it was full of traps," said Sandy, seeing that he commanded attention. "In fact, several rabbits were squealing piteously. I thought at first the dog had killed them, but I led her out and saw quite nine or ten. I did not think of it until now."

Here he caught Graves' eye, and rendered confused by its bitter glare, he took another egg with his jam.

"Your wood, Graves," said Gervase drily. "Oh, poachers, of course. You can warn your keepers." But the M.F.H.'s manner was remote as he said good-bye to the now purple baronet.

"Rates a half-broken chap like poor Hurst, and does it himself," burst out Standish. "Well done, Sandy. You can always tread on his toes. You and Catty will give us a few extra foxes this year: he'll be afraid to do it now."

"Good-bye, Acland," said Gervase, very gravely. "It has given me the greatest pleasure to have met you, though our introduction was stormy. I hope you've come to stay."

"If I can learn to understand jumping, and can

keep fit, I trust that I have," said Sandy hopefully, as he followed Standish.

"He may be an absolute fool, but there's something good about the little chap," said Gervase, recounting the tales of the hounds and the rabbits, so that the two outside heard the roar of merriment.

"Laughing at me?" said Sandy, unhurt.

As they drove homewards behind the excited roan, they passed their horse, and Sandy, seeing him, suddenly recalled Holy Robin's existence.

"Why," he said. "I've never seen Tom and Robin all day."

"'Twould have been hard for you," returned Standish, "for he spent the best part of it in the river. Robin took off too soon, and in any case, it was the wide part, where no horses could jump it."

"But what induced Tom to go to that part?" asked Sandy angrily, thinking of his horse.

"That," said Standish, "you'd better ask the Robin and the hard side he has to his mouth."

Sandy was silent for a long time. He had expected some slight praise of his prowess, and was disappointed to find that it was looked upon as a mere natural course of events; also, that the mantle of undying shame would have fallen upon him if he succeeded in turning Blackbird back to the road.

"Hunting," he remarked, as he neared home—"hunting is really a very extraordinary thing."

"I think," said Standish, taking the avenue at a gallop, "there are other things even more extraordinary. Your glass might show you one, eh, Sandy? You and your foxes' burrows."

His sudden bray of laughter brought Mary Anne to the door.

"Very tired, sir?" asked Phillips, proffering the boot-jack. "Very stiff, I feel sure, sir."

"Exceedingly . . . bumped . . . Phillips," said Sandy, sitting down cautiously. "There is a great deal of bumping in hunting, Phillips, but it is a fine sport."

"Certainly, sir," said Phillips, agreeing.

CHAPTER XII

OF FURTHER FOX-CHASING AND DIVERS DOINGS

"I remember how merry a start we got,
When the red fox broke from the gorse,
In a country so deep, a scent so hot,
That the hound could outpace the horse."
—GORDON.

"A LITTLE stiff, sir," said Phillips pleasantly, as he helped Sandy to get up, and bent him with gentle force into the hip-bath provided.

Sandy groaned; he ached in every limb; the inside of his knees were raw; he recalled the saddle least when he stood.

"Very hot water and soda—that is, washing-soda, sir, is recommended by Miss Catty," said Phillips taking up a can.

Acland nodded, but next moment escaped from his tub with a yell of pain and fervent remarks to the effect that he had been boiled alive. Phillips had doused him with scalding water which had been prepared to cure him.

Sandy chose the softest part of his bed, sat upon it and swore. But as he grew easier and proceeded with his toilet, Phillips heard many tales of the wondrous jumps, the ditches, navigable streams, and walls, and directly his breakfast was over, Sandy

dragged himself to Blackbird's stable, armed with carrots for his mare.

The black's legs were swathed in bandages; she moved stiffly, as she always did after a day's hunting, and Tom, coming in, informed Sandy that she had a great welt on her behind the saddle, but that he'd "thry to sthupe it down before Friday."

"She is a most wonderful animal," said her master fondly, feeling the velvety nose. "The manner in which she cleared that stream and got across those banks was marvellous. I assure you, Tom, that I took more exercise than she did."

"Which would account for the boom on her back," observed Tom thoughtfully.

"But I am disappointed in the Robin," said Sandy, wondering how he had lived so long without a horse of his own. "I cannot countenance his remaining for half a day in a muddy stream all owing to his own carelessness."

Tom, muttering something concerning hard mouths, said the Robin was now sobered entirely. He'd watch goin' into foolish places for the future, and had been like a lamb after his bath.

"In fact"—they moved on to the chestnut's stable—"Mr. Acland could put a leg over him himself on Friday, the hounds so near an' all. 'Twould be practice for ye, sir, and he'll be quite as gintle as a tinker's ass."

Sandy contemplated the shining horse, patting his nose softly, but feeling certain that he would never dare to ride the lively animal in pursuit of those flying hounds. If Tom could not manage him, what could he do? Supposing he had trusted himself to the mercies of the chestnut yesterday, and had spent his day in the river? He suggested this, but Tom

became reticent on the subject, and almost resentful. He gave the Robin a small quantity of sweet clover-hay, and remarked that all things had to be larnt; even for death they'd mostly prepare you with a sickness. Iveryone of the foxy breed was a bit hasty at the commincemint.

He then stamped off to his other treasures, and Sandy levered his aching joints back to an arm-chair and feather cushions.

Standish invited him to come out schooling a new filly, but Sandy declined. His powers of endurance were limited; he was really over-tired. So he remained in his chair nursing Aunt Catty's cat, while the old ladies flitted in and out, bickering incessantly, and proscribing for his stiffness.

Aunt Catty told him that she had herself prepared and brought up the brew of scalding water and washing-soda which Phillips had poured over him.

"Nothing at all like it. In fact, I think I heard you cry out as I passed," said Miss Catty, who had been listening to see if her remedy would be accepted.

Sandy almost thought she might; recalling his roar of anguish, and the subsequent hue of his skin.

Aunt Susie said she had sent the bottle of fish oil, which he remembered that he had smelt and thrown out of the window: he retrieved it guiltily next day from the depths of a flower-bed. But they petted and looked after him; he was really knocked up; his heart shivered unpleasantly; his body felt like lead. Phillips brought chicken-broth, instead of milk and soda at twelve, remarking that Miss Susie had ordered it, as being more sustaining. It smelt

excellent, strewn in old-world fashion with dried marigold leaves.

"Directed that hen-soup would be more nourishing for you to-day as you were so exhausted, sir," said Phillips, laying it down.

Acland took some, reproving his man for mis-naming it, and thanked Aunt Susie, who arrived smiling.

"The dun filly kicked my poor old dorking this morning," said Miss Susie tearfully, "and broke its back. I at once thought of you, Sandy, and she's been boiling ever since, poor dear."

Sandy felt his appetite for chicken-broth dwindle ; he nibbled at the slices of thin toast, and having surreptitiously fed the Persian from his saucer, directed Phillips to remove the cup.

"You see it was hen-soup, sir," said Phillips, with respectful cheerfulness. "That was why I said so, sir. A very aged fowl, sir."

"Oh, go the devil, Phillips!" snapped Sandy, below his breath.

"Certainly, sir. Thank you, sir," said Phillips, taking the cup.

Aunt Susie went out for her new brood of chickens to pick up the crumbs. She carried them in a box, and perched them upon a newspaper ; little, bright-eyed, friendly morsels of fluff—which the great cat watched thoughtfully as they ran and cheeped—driving his claws in his reverie deep into Sandy's legs.

Then the aunts left him alone. They were busy old ladies, paying old-fashioned attention to house-keeping, preserving various garden produces as the seasons came round, making excellent liqueurs, weighing out sugar and butter for cakes, darning

house linen so that it looked like new ; always pattering up and down stairs, in and out of the gardens, rooting weeds as they passed ; trotting to the hen-house, taking a daily list of the eggs.

The little man leant back. Cats, chickens, hen-soup, hunting, exhaustion, stiffness, soreness, yet, as Alexander Acland crawled across for Jorrocks, he felt that the world was a good place to keep alive in, and he wondered what Friday would be like.

That grim shadow had dropped behind yesterday, distanced by fleeting hounds. Sandy did not want to die ; he felt life beat hard in his veins, notwithstanding his tire.

He thought of London, wrapped in fogs—the papers said so—of clubland and all its comforts in these dark days : of Bridge played in the afternoons, the big, luxurious rooms, the sense of being in the world, and . . . He drew nearer to the fire of turf and wood, and felt that this was better. Coal warms ; but wood, singing and spluttering, is friend and companion both.

Outside the moisture-laden clouds had massed, and the rain fell in leaden sheets, driven by a wild nor'wester.

It was a day on which aching limbs gave one a pleasant right to rest, as it passed pleasantly to grey dimness. The dripping arrival of Standish, and the subsequent discussion of hounds and horses by that worthy until bed-time.

Sometimes the four played whist, a dead-card language which the old ladies delighted in. They could not be taught Bridge with any success, never losing the desire to rough on a no-trump declaration, and invariably getting so confused by disappointment that their play was thenceforth eccentric.

The week drifted wetly to Friday, when the wind veered; the leaden clouds scurried over the arc of the horizon, and pearly vapours floated on a background of pallid blue. The sun shone when the rep curtains were pulled back, and — this time without a qualm — Sandy saw his hunting things laid upon a chair.

"Very fine morning, sir. Tom wishes to know if you'll ride Holy Robin, sir."

"Certainly not," said Sandy, taking his tea.

"Tom says that if not he must pad the saddle off the mare's back. The ground exceedingly soft, sir," said Phillips, softly persuasive. "Robin's a charming horse to ride, sir."

Sandy raised himself upon a pink-striped elbow. Like most sandy-haired men, he always wore that rosy colour when possible. He looked at his valet with growing suspicion. Mr. Phillips' trousers were very shiny at the knees.

"Phillips," he said, "*may* I ask if you have been learning to ride?"

Phillips coughed apologetically.

"Commenced on the old white mare, sir, and showed aptitude, so Ell—that is, so I was informed. And then, well, not exactly riding, sir; merely endeavouring to sit on in the paddock, sir. Shall I inform Tom that you will ride the chestnut, sir?"

"No, Phillips, you will not," said Sandy. "Tell him to do something to the mare's back."

"Certainly, sir," said Phillips, going out.

Blackbird's "welt" was safely guarded, and they jogged to the meet, which was only a mile away; Sandy secretly pleased at the absence of any unruly driving horse.

It was a small meet, too far from Tullow for a

crowd. They gathered at four cross-roads, and then commenced to climb up the hill where Standish had first pointed out the gorse covert.

It was a wild, lonely place; the square of green gorse bright against the rugged mountain, the earth strewn with loose stones, intersected by narrow cattle-paths, steep and bleak—a terrifying spot for an inexperienced fox-hunter. The flat, with its big fences, had been bad enough: this was appalling. To ascend, clinging to a mane; to slide down, holding by the back of the saddle, or to be swept along the side, along one of those bridle tracks, seemed all equally dangerous. Sandy crouched by the big bank which guarded the covert, and prayed secretly for a blank draw. But hounds were hardly in before a fox slipped out, stealing away just beneath them—a little red body loping along one of the paths, and plainly to be seen.

The country people yelled themselves hoarse, and this clear view destroyed Sandy's self-control. He had never seen a fox break covert before.

He caught at Standish's arm, crying:

"I—I see a fox—a fox!" in a sibilant hiss of wonder. "A fox—the fox!" he repeated. "I see him—a fox!"

Standish, who was always damping, inquired gloomily whether he thought he'd see a hyena leave Templemore Hill, and Sandy's enthusiasm dropped. Hounds poured out, a wave of light against the sombre background, spreading out fan-like, working busily; then one had it, then another, and they were away along a narrow track, made by the cattle as they wander along the hill. It was wide enough for hounds; a mere treacherous ribbon when the field took to it. Sandy, carried on by

Blackbird, unable to follow those wiser spirits who galloped up to the crest of the hill, found himself cantering along in hideous jeopardy, with a sheer fall at his left side and a sheer rise at his right. He sat very still, and drew a sobbing breath of joy when they turned upwards and ran along the flattened top of the mountain. Here there were stones, holes, and crumbling, awkward fences, but at least there was something to fall on if misfortune overtook one.

A hill-hunt is better to watch than to take part in. They ran from Templemore to Athgarvan and back three times; sometimes dipping to the small fields on the left side of the mountain, always running up again to the frowning top. The wise men were content to circle slowly and watch hounds as they came backwards and forwards; even Blackbird grew bored, and jogged along in a pleasant fashion. A whirling mass of legs and bucking body having revealed itself as Robin, with Tom clamped to his back, made Sandy indignantly thankful. Supposing he had been there when this began. Tom could scarcely call the hill soft.

Now between Templemore and Ballymacshane run three miles of the most perfect valley it can be a fox-hunter's fate to cross. It was deep to-day, with silver pools of water glinting in the sunshine; but it was a line to dream of, with its flat grass fields and easy, broad banks. Unfortunately, hill foxes love their homes, and trust to their wits among their native cairns, rather than make a bold dash for freedom across the open country. People yawned, wishing the hunt over; but the unexpected happened. There were two foxes in Templemore, and one, getting tired of waiting, slipped off downwards, with no

intention of being hunted, for he believed his brother had monopolised all that. Fox proposes; man disposes. This cub, screened in his thick gorse, chose a foolish moment. His panting brother, now getting very jaded, had just slipped back to covert; hounds, having run very fast over some rough ground, were alone, and at fault, outside. As the fresh fox slipped over the fence and out into the hill, he was greeted by a storm of yells from the country people, and by a sudden outburst of yowling which told him he must stretch his limbs, or give up the joys of life for ever more.

He streaked straight ahead, trusting to his speed; while down the slope, close on him, poured the pack: bristles up, mute now, terrible; every hound athirst for blood. They had viewed their prey, and they raced madly, close on it, cheered on by the country people's frantic shrieks.

In their wake, terrified, but quite irresponsible, believing that all men must descend in a like manner, thundered, slid, and scraped Acland and his black mare. She had taken charge when the sudden hubbub arose, and realising the futility of consulting Sandy, took the shortest route to her beloved hounds. That it was sheer down the side of a mountain was nothing to her. Slipping, scrambling; leaping from tussock to path, and path to tussock, with uneven bounds, her rider gripping the back of his saddle and leaving the reins loose.

What had been a long climb upwards, seemed to the half-frantic little man to be now compassed in three bounds through space, until they alighted upon a narrow, rutty lane, on to which Blackbird turned, and knowing her way, galloped hard for the road by.

Then Acland took courage to raise his head and

look back. To realise, as he did so, that he was first away, that other horses were coming decorously by various circuitous paths, and that he—he—was alone with the hounds. Yet not with them, for they were pouring across to his right, while his mare, snorting with excitement, bore on to the left.

Between him and the road lay two narrow fields, sloping steeply, and never ridden across; for the first was fenced by a high and unbreakable timber gap, and the second by an appalling drop straight on the hard road. Acland knew nothing of this. The lust of the chase boiled in his veins; hound's way was his way: his pale blood was on fire, and there was no man near to warn him. He caught up the reins, and with new-born authority, swung Blackbird round, jumping off the lane along which his wiser mount would have carried him.

"The devil's own thruster, though he sits like a sick tailor," said Gervase, as he swung into the lane. "By Jove! I believe Graves is not going to be outdone."

Now Edmund Graves was one of the most jealous men on earth. No good hunt was a pleasure to him if any-one else had two inches the best of it. He rode, not for sport, but against brother sportsmen and measured his pleasure by his position. Given a flying start quite alone, he lost all interest, if there, because there was no one to pound. He watched Sandy's descent with thunderous eyes, and though he knew of both stick and drop, he, too, turned off the lane: he would have done so if the Styx lay in front. So, bustling his good mare, he pushed hard down the narrow field, just as Sandy, with loose reins and a bumping seat, cantered easily at the gap. It was a baulk of timber, high and stiff, secured

at either end with huge stones, and possibly with wire, for the rest of the fence hung out this danger-signal. It was out of trampled sticky mud on to a worse landing, was four feet six high, and altogether as untempting a spot as anyone could have looked or wished for. To Sandy, it represented a fence and nothing more; he trusted to the mare and went at it unabashed. Blackbird, best of hunters, measured the obstacle, cocked her ears, felt the ground slip and squelch beneath her feet, stopped dead-short, and with a grunt, bucked high and clear, half a foot above the top stick, giving a crooked lift of her strong quarters as she did so. Sandy rocked at the stop, shot high from the saddle at the bucking jump, and, finally undone by the uplifted quarters, flew into the air, to come bump against the mud, clawing at nothing, and swearing helplessly.

"Good . . . good gracious!" he squealed mildly, feeling his intact limbs one by one. "How distressing."

Blackbird, who was a lady, waited for him.

He looked up to see Graves' face glowering over the timber; Sir Edward had charged it resolutely. His mare swerved, but held in a grip of iron, slid with her chest against the stick, and stayed there, sulking.

"I—believe I must have fallen off," remarked Sandy pleasantly, to the angry face.

"Then, for God's sake—get up!" ejaculated Graves balefully. "If I had got over, I should have killed you, for you're just in the way; sitting there like a hatching mud-lark. Move; I'm coming!"

"I am not responsible for the spot I alight in," said Sandy irately, scrambling to his feet. He was

very muddy. "But I will leave it clear for you," he added, with dignity, as he caught Blackbird.

He clambered to his saddle and rode off, turning his head to see Graves coming at the stick for the second time, his whip up; and to see the mare baulk again determinately.

The short cut, notwithstanding the fall, had brought Sandy first on to the road. He was dismayed to see it gleaming quite six feet below the hedge. He pulled at Blackbird, who was kindly cautious, remembering her forelegs, but a friendly countryman, indicating what he termed a soft place, the scramble down was accomplished with success. As he jumped a wide ditch at the far side, Sandy realised that he had kept his start. Illness, money-making, long years of routine, they fell away in those happy, pungent moments, as he rocked and bumped in his saddle, with knees wide and hand high, but close to the pack. How they drove at it. Even Sandy could appreciate that. Now the leading hound hesitated, and the side hounds swung in. There it was again. Rambler spoke, and wrested the lead. Over the grass fields; swishing through pools of water; tailing a little, for the pace was terrific; dashing ahead without a check; silent, blood-thirsty, determined; wistful faces set ahead. A great wave of life seeking death as their goal.

"Well done, man!" cried out Gervase, as he swung his clean-bred chestnut past Acland at a level ditch. "Well done, man! By Jingo! They're fluting. It's a fair knock-out to slow horses. They're travelling to-day."

"Oh, they are! They are smelling—perfectly," jerked out Sandy, in a breathless staccato; hotly jubilant, his face aglow. "I cannot take my eyes

from them. They have never once lost the trail."

"God bless me!" said the master to himself.

"We'll make a saint of you, Sandy. Stick to it, man! Drive her along! Don't bucket like swing boats."

It was Standish now, riding out his brown four-year-old.

Hounds dwelt for a welcome second; it was scarcely any more.

"We'll canonise you," beamed Standish. "Didn't Graves take the finest fall you ever saw at the timber, straight into his top hat, and his mare got away from him."

"How distressing and expensive!" gasped Sandy. "Oh, they are goin' on. This — this is heaven, Standish!"

The ground was deep and holding; they splashed through those silvery pools, and left them clay-coloured in their wake. With that one semblance of a check, they crossed the valley, and reached the foot of the hills. Scent failed a little as they left the grass and got into the heather; they ran slowly up the steep ascent, horses sobbing in distress. It was stiffly fenced here with narrow, ditchless banks, to be taken uphill by blown steeds. Dirty coats were many before they jumped on to the road just below Ballymacshane, and knew by the shouts upon the hill that their fox was close before them. Then the whole of Ballymacshane appeared to pour out up the rough slope. The two old ladies, panting and toddling; one with the Persian beneath her arm . . . Mary Ann, the cook, Ellie . . . all running and shrieking. The boys; every workman in the place. Horses appeared to be dragged from everywhere;

Standish's cherished youngsters came flying out with stable-helpers upon them, and their owner merely smiled helplessly. The steward and the gardener, riding barebacked, lashed the plough horses through the heather. There was the old white mare, wheezing hideously, ridden by another gardener; the two donkeys, which might have been left at home, since their riders had to descend to drag them along.

Tom, upon Holy Robin, appeared at Sandy's side.

"He jumped as if the devil was lodged inside him," he said, glowing. "Ye must get on him yerself. Sure, such a jump I never saw as the old mare thrun over the stick."

Sandy, blushing, said he regretted his fall.

"I might have fallen meself with the buck she med," said Tom, laying balm to wounded spirit. "May Moon took it with her knees, an' turned over. Begor, ye did well, sir—fust off an' all."

There might possibly be other things in the world. But this, this was fame. Sandy was flushed crimson as he topped the rise, surrounded by the wave of followers from the house. The crowd of Blundell retainers drove onwards happily.

"Close afore ye," yelled someone. "Bate out, an the tail dhroopin' off him."

"Exceedingly tired, sir. Will certainly be killed and eaten, sir."

"Phillips!" Sandy turned to his hitherto immaculate valet, who, with trousers rucked to the knees, with scarlet face and capless head, was thrashing the long-eared mule with a broken golf-stick. "Phillips, I am surprised at you," said his master, in hurt tones.

"Certainly, sir," said Phillips happily, "Oh, we

shall certainly catch him, sir," and he drove the mule on, ahead of his employer, using the stick freely.

Their fox was dead-beat, and close in front of them. They checked by a patch of wood. Here Tom got off the Robin and on to one of the squealing youngsters to give it a lesson. He directed the instant return of the mule to the yard, but seeing Phillips' face, said he might mount the hot chestnut and follow at a gentle trot.

Micky, the boy who had brought out the young roan, immediately took the mule and pursued in the rear. Phillips mounted Holy Robin with a dexterity which awed Sandy, and they went on. The maids were taking short cuts, holding their petticoats very high, and giggling loudly.

"Tally ho!" said Sandy suddenly.

"Where, sir?" shrieked the first whip, thundering up.

"What? Oh, stop them!" cried the master.

For a high scream of anguish rent the air, and men got round the hounds to prevent the death of Miss Catty's blue Persian, which had leapt from her arms, and was now streaking for shelter, his brush outstretched.

The cat having been viewed across the garden wall, they dragged on, and just then Graves, with a sullen face and ruined hat, arrived. His first business being to approach Sandy, whom he now looked on with bitter jealousy as a reckless but idiotic thruster.

Sandy, always polite, was foolish enough to proffer sympathy.

"I suppose all fences are alike to you," growled the baronet savagely. "Six feet of timber in a gap is like a two-foot wall."

Sandy, explaining, suggested that one was timber and one stone, and was unaware of the open sneer.

"Oh, it's well you're on that mare." Graves eyed him suspiciously.

"In that case I did not remain upon her," said Sandy humbly, recalling his voluntary. "But why not buy a more enterprising animal yourself, Graves? That one really never wished to jump; she looked quite afraid."

Now Graves was riding a very celebrated mare, whose one weak spot was timber. He gasped heavily, bereft of speech.

"Standish would sell you something," went on Sandy kindly. "Look at the two which he gave to me. It's so expensive riding untaught horses. Of course you can get your hat blocked, but even that is sixpence. Now Standish, if you asked him—"

That gentleman, who had edged close to listen, rent the air with his laughter, and hounds suddenly went on, or unpleasantness might have ensued.

"He can knock him every time," murmured Standish to himself, "and the best of it is, its generally unconscious."

Sandy, now complete master of his mount, galloped on. The glory of the hunt was over; they ran hard for a mile among the heather, and then the beaten fox saved his life by squeezing into an ill-stopped hole, and lying there, heaving and panting, but safe.

"I'm sorry, Acland"—Gervase got off to peer in—"I'm sorry, Acland. You should certainly have had the brush."

Sandy looked at the baying, disappointed hounds; he looked back at the stretch of valley, golden under

the sun's rays, its quiet pools silver once more, and he shook his head.

"I should have liked to stuff the tail," he said; and then the face of the little man glowed as it had never glowed before. "If the fox was dead, he could never run, and we could never come after him the same way again."

"There's a great deal in that," said Gervase quietly, collecting his hounds and moving on to the next draw.

This was on the hill. They found, to run through tangled heather, up and down steep places, and in and out of pools of water, which, in defiance of construction, lay upon the mountain-tops; it was a tiresome hunt; and Sandy, seeing that even Standish watched more than followed, thought that he, too, might pull up, and describe a limited radius as the hounds circled from rise to rise. Now dipping into a hollow; now appearing far away, a tiny trail of straining bodies dotted against the dark heather; always turning back to the covert they had started from, as the fox dodged and circled. Some people followed them grimly; one hapless blur of grey, facing a low bank, represented Evie Hartland, who had come round by the road from Athgarvan.

Sandy's heart melted. She, too, loved hunting (observe the adjective which he now mentally used) . . . it was hard indeed that she should have to ride this useless beast and try to make it go.

He mused, sitting in the shelter of some trees, until Fate sent to him O'Neill's nephew, mounted upon the liver chestnut, and full of its wonderful prowess. "How he'd laid the heels, nate an' handy, to the narrow banks; that gintale, he wouldn't have smashed eggs; how he'd cleared ditches, flown walls,

and generally distinguished himself. An' the mouth of him light as a goose's pluckin'," declaimed O'Neill's nephew, waving the thick, bleached reins of his snaffle bridle. "A regular horse for a lady or an inexperienced huntsman," Here O'Neill's nephew clearly meant to be personal. "Faix, if poor Miss Evie had him, she wouldn't be left behind."

Sixty pounds. A vast sum of money to a miserly man. Acland rested his chin upon his hand. It took him a long time to save so much; it represented many second-class tickets, cutting down of telegrams, under-tipped porters, scurries to catch 'buses; "and, glory be to God! the mare is rowled over," exclaimed O'Neill's nephew dramatically.

A small group of men instantly rushed to Evie's rescue. She was picked up, evidently unhurt, and remounted; but they saw her ride away dejectedly down the hill, and leave the hunt behind.

Acland put his lips together; when he opened them, it was to speak volubly. He was sufficiently shrewd when he had anything to go on. He was soon involved in a heated argument with the young countryman; out of which tangle they emerged, mentally hand-in-hand, talking earnestly, now that a price was agreed on. And a certain arrangement was made, by which the chestnut horse was to be handed over to Evie Hartland. The long-backed grey, whose total value was about £10, was to be taken in full exchange, on the plea of a purchaser who wished for such an animal—the inducement to the O'Neill's nephew being a surreptitious cheque for £40, which was never to be spoken of or mentioned.

He swore the youth to secrecy, and went homeward; but he trilled a little song as Blackbird picked

her clever way down the steep path. It was sweet to do good. He thought of the girl's innocent pleasure; her pride at selling the useless grey; her swift progress close beside him in future hunts on that good horse. Life was not so bad a thing to strive for.

Nora Hartland had praised him to-day, backed up by Standish, who was secretly proud of his guest. "His heart's in the right place, and his body soon will be," said Standish, who possessed the power of paying compliments ill.

"Who would have thought," said Nora, "when the chestnut colt ran away with you down the avenue that you were the makings of such a thruster? I'm sure Edmund never dreamt then that you would pound him at a stick."

So Sandy sang. Nora was undoubtedly the nicest woman he had ever met; one of those rare people whose moods always seem to tune in with our own—sad when we are sad, merry when we are merry; sympathetic always. She never laughed at his silly mistakes; he could talk to her of hounds and horses, and merely be put right in a gentle way. Then there was Evie. Evie was the prettiest thing he had ever seen, excepting long dead Kathleen, whose deserted home lay below him in a belt of dark trees. He could please Nora now by making Evie happy; see them both smile when he went and found the chestnut in the stable. They would ride hunts together, thought the elated little man, as he unlatched the paddock gate and rode into the yard, the mare's feet unheard on the grass.

"An' a nice, gintle way ye took the Robin," Tom was exclaiming as Acland came in. "Beltein' him



over the hill, Phillips, for all ye were worth ; an' he jaded an' all."

Phillips, who moved stiffly, shook his head.

"Exceedingly headstrong animal, Tom," he remarked urbanely. "Would proceed at his own pace, Tom, which is what you call the gallop. And not at all tired—not at all. I brought him home against his will, Tom."

"Phillips!" thundered his master, close to him. "You had no business to ride at all."

"Certainly, sir. Help you down, sir," said Phillips, faintly pink. "Enthralling sport, fox-hunting, sir."

There was something almost appealingly human in the valet's eye. Acland unbent, and smiled as he slid into his man's arms.

"I'm afraid it is, Phillips," he said, as he went in.

Luncheon, a truly Irish meal, consisting of a few turkeys, two pieces of beef, cold hams, and other small things, was laid in the dining-room and attended to by a fast arriving crowd. The fat cook was spending torrid moments in the kitchen as she "slhapped" relays of hot cakes into her oven and cursed all fox-hunters freely, yet enjoying it all the time.

"Not that much butther they'd see at Droveen," she was announcing just as Acland came past, and she dabbed whole pats between the smoking hot lightness. Mrs. Magee's cakes were things to be remembered. A crowd of grooms were gathered round the long table, taking their share of the baking. Between them, with unerring deftness, Mrs. Magee beat eggs and swept in cream and sifted flour, and was ready for another batch to follow this one, "Save us, they'd ate the nation," she said proudly,

bidding one Patsy take his head to one side while she'd slash two eggs.

Upstairs the house hummed with merry voices. The Hartlands were there, Evie's pretty face the only sad one among the crowd. She lamented openly, bewailing her lost winter, wondering what she could do. Sandy, dividing his attention between turkeys and poached eggs, knew how nearly her troubles were over.

"It breaks my heart to see the child fret," Nora said to him, and was surprised to see him smile—hurt even, not knowing what he thought of—which was that by making Evie happy he could make her happy too.

Phillips, who expected a scolding, was unusually attentive. The hot water was tempered to the exact heat. He had laid out silk sox and several ties. The Hartlands were staying to dinner, Standish having sent home their horses, and a flotsam and jetsam of clothes, remaining from other days, being in the house.

"Gold links or pearl, sir?" inquired Phillips, with unusual thought, to his humming master.

"Chestnut. Evie's," replied Sandy absently, continuing his tuneful trill concerning a Star of his soul.

"Certainly, sir. *Gor Lumme!*" breathed Phillips to the shirt-cuff in agitated staccato.

CHAPTER XIII

OF SOME JEWELS AND A JACKDAW

"Said, 'The devil must be in that little jackdaw!'"

—*Ingoldsby Legends.*

STANDISH, wrestling with new gloves, said that he would rather be boiled with a hundred eels.

The plough horses and the old waggonette were at the door. Tom observed the world from beneath the brim of a top hat, and was sheltered in a blue livery coat. Aunt Susie and Catty required the services of Mary Kate to pin and tie and fix, as they rustled about uneasily in their best clothes.

The immediate reason of this was an invitation to Droveen Court, the Court, Evie had informed him, having been tacked on by the present owner. It appeared that it was a yearly festival, faithfully observed; an annual gracious condescending on the part of Mrs. Ievers to all her country neighbours, who invariably accepted.

"Everyone goes in turn," cooed Miss Susie, trying to poke her veil off her flattened nose. "It would be quite singular to refuse." Acland had refused at first, heartily, his sensitive mind casting back to his unintentioned bull's-eyes concerning grocers; but later, hearing that the Hartlands were to be there, he wavered, put on his best blue suit, and was ready with the others.

Phillips was at the door of the carriage. He had expressed a wish to come as second man ; stood with mask-like face, only unbending to remark as he came round to Tom that they might be late for lunch.

"I'll leather the skins from them," said Tom hopefully, starting the fat pair at an astonished canter.

"Herded up," growled Standish, "for three hours of a lovely day . . . it was pouring rain . . . with a great hot lunch, all ornaments and nothing good, and Mrs. Ievers talking down to her country neighbours."

"She could never talk down to a Blundell, Standish," said Aunt Catty complacently. "Good gracious! the garden tabby might as well think of looking down upon my blue Persian."

Droveen is a long, low house, slightly more ornate than Castleknock or Ballymacshane, its front windows level with the ground ; box-bordered flower-beds grouping round them. The front was very spick-and-span, yet there were side glimpses of plasterless walls, unkempt grounds, and unclipt laurels, which contradicted the imposing show.

Sandy was nervous, fearing he might be unwelcome, and turned over possible speeches of reconciliation, as the waggonette drew up at the door. The Hartlands' dog-cart was just going round.

The hall was a fine one, hung with antlers and heads, and good old prints ; but it smelt musty. One's breath was a fog in it ; a chair touched in passing left a clammy memory. Stiffness, a sense of fine manners and lack of home, settle on the visitors as who comes into Droveen. This was a visit of state . . . no friendly interchange of

courtesies . . . but an attendance upon a twentieth-rate power.

"The Misses Blundell, Mr. Blundell, and Mr. Lackland," announced the butler sonorously. He bore a strong family likeness to the coachman whom Sandy and Evie had met upon the road ; in fact, the former decided that they must be brothers.

Graves was also there.

The drawing-room was long and cold—the fire burnt with the air of the stranger, the chintz-covered chairs were arctic, the cushions lumps of ice. Everything was handsome and uncomfortable and carefully kept.

"So pleased you could come to us." Mrs. Ievers, dismissing the Hartlands, rustled two steps to meet them. She was resplendent in her own home—creaky in black satin, webbed about with good lace, sparkling with minor jewels—her toupee bearing the stamp of London. Her cold eye fell happily upon the two old ladies' plain dresses ; upon the Hartlands' country-made coats and skirts.

"Ah! how d'ye do, Mr. Acland?" Her smile was tinged with vinegar. "Oh, Nita, my dear, I must introduce you—Miss Cropthorne," etc.

Miss Cropthorne was almost more gorgeous than her hostess. She presented to the eyes of the Tulloun people the house-dress of a society young lady. It was carried out in dull pink, with a very elaborate, neckless lace blouse, and countless beads and jingles wound round a long, brown throat. Nita Cropthorne must have been very pretty before she grew worried. Now there were hard lines between her eyebrows and about her mouth, her powder could not conceal a network of fine wrinkles, and her beautifully-dressed red hair did not match her skin. She shook

hands languidly, with a waft of *Violette de Parme*. With her dull pink, her jingles, toys, and conscious air of good looks, she made a distinct impression. Sunny-faced Evie, in her cheap, limp tweed, felt the bitter serpent jealousy about her heart.

"So charming for Neill having Nita here."

The pink young lady had rustled to the fire. Mrs. Ievers was left with the Misses Blundell.

"I met her last year—Lord de Sleer's daughter—so sweet, so pretty. Neill is most attracted. Very suitable in all ways."

At the fire Miss Crophorne, in a fretful voice, was discussing Bridge, she had immediately absorbed the three men.

"I've had the most shocking poisonous luck all this autumn—positively wicked. Go no trumps on three suits and find eight of the fourth to your left—double, of course— Oh, and in everything. It's really appalling, all one can lose nowadays."

Acland sympathised . . . remembering how luck went with him. He was a player who never ventured, and consequently seldom won.

Miss Crophorne brightened visibly.

"One, two three, four. We can play after luncheon. Oh, we must; I'm dying for a game. Do, Mr. Ievers." She opened her big, black eyes at Neill, insisting on a promise. "I can make it right with your mother," she said. "Oh, that will be quite delightful; she can't or won't play, so we never have a rubber."

But Neill shook his head decidedly, he had other games to play. Acland slipped away, back to Evie and Nora. Mrs. Ievers commenced fresh introductions, this time of a clean-shaven, clever-looking little man who was not quite at his ease.

"Mr Fielding, the lawyer," she explained. "You

see you've lighted on quite an exciting day. Nita has been left a really handsome collection of jewels by an aunt—and they were brought down to her to-day. We might see them. Nita, my love, we should like to see your jewels afterwards."

"You're most welcome to!" Miss Crophorne's voice was still pitched fretfully. "They're very little use to me, as I can't afford to re-set them, but there's the big diamond to look at."

"Nita's father," exclaimed Mrs. Ievers, "is rather strict with the child—only gives her an allowance—and I fear she is a little extravagant. — Oh, luncheon."

They filed into the big dining-room, not quite so cold as the drawing-room they left. It was resplendent in crimson leather, stamped with the Ievers' crest. Sundry coroneted pieces of plate stood on the table, and their hostess called attention to them. "My brother-in-law's," she explained. "He has lent them to us—you see, he really wants so little as a bachelor."

It was rather cruel of Standish to say so he didn't take them back since last year, and thus recall the previous explanation, but Mrs. Ievers passed it over. Luncheon was, as Standish prophesied, pretentious. There was soup, and long-named *entrées*, and highly ornamented meats, and nothing Acland thought half as good as grilled chops and salad, and potatoes in their jackets would have been at Ballymacshane. Conversation hung a little, but Nita Crophorne talked on, in her high-pitched voice, seldom leaving her theme of Bridge.

"Lost—lost. I don't like to *think* of my luck at the last week; I simply had to go away. There were one or two people there who never lost.—Oh,

never play Bridge, you innocent people ;" and she smiled at Nora, who was eating a bad luncheon.

"I often play." Evie spoke bluntly, her Irish voice very soft after the English girl's. "I very often win, but my points are not ruinous. Threepence—I can't afford more. It's my limit."

"Oh, but you can lose fortunes at threepence—in fact, that's what we played at Storney, and last week alone I lost fifty golden pounds."

Evie, with twinkling eyes, observed that she meant threepence a hundred.

"A what? A hundred! Oh!"

The English girl lost all interest. She drank two or three whiskys-and-sodas until a flush of colour made her pretty; but she seemed thinking all the time of some hidden worry, knitting her brows and crumbling her bread.

The butler, aided by a somewhat clumsy maid, did wonders with so large a party. They had reached the stage of anæmic coffee when Mrs. Ievers apologised for the absence of her footman. "So hard to keep in the country," she said languidly, "and we are really short."

The windows, which were French, looked out on a large croquet lawn—the hoops always in the ground.

"A brown horse," said Acland, who was opposite the window, "is grazing on the lawn. He has just come."

With a bound, the hitherto silent butler reached the window.

"The drivin' mare," he wailed, as he tore at the fastening. "She'll twisht herself for life in the wires down there. That's Mikey Sheahan's work. Isn't it what comes of lavin' one's job to a useless—" The remainder was lost as he skirted across the lawn.

holding out the coffee-tray as an imaginary sieve and calling softly.

A silence fell upon the party. Mrs. Ievers was purple. The interlude had not toned well with the speech. Sandy no longer wondered at the strong likeness of coachman to butler.

"I have her cot, ma'am. Wait till I finds Mikey," announced triumphant tones from the croquet lawn, and the butler disappeared with arms round about the mare's neck. Some specks upon the grass represented the relics of the coffee-cups.

"Shall we go back to the drawing-room?" said Mrs. Ievers icily. "The man is fond of the horses and really forgets himself."

Breathing heavily, she ushered them out, returning to the chill airs of the long room. The heavy dullness which is so often the aftermath of a long luncheon fell upon them.

Miss Susie and Miss Catty wanted a gentle sleep. Standish, who had made the glasses ring by an ill-timed "Ha, ha!" when the horse had appeared, had made signals as they left; but one cannot in common politeness run away directly one has eaten, so the old ladies disposed themselves in hard chairs and the younger people herded near the indifferent fire.

"Rain, dulness"—the worried look was even more apparent now that there were no men to smile at; Nita Crophorne yawned. "It's very nice to stay at, but I couldn't live in Ireland."

"Oh, you wouldn't like to!"

Evie raised a flushed face. Was it possible that anyone could desire a better fate than life in this green land? Then the hope of living in that chill house, with Neill to worship and adore—Evie loved it all—even the cold chintz and damp air. Neill sat

on one and breathed the other, therefore both were perfection.

"I wouldn't for gold," yawned Nita, who aspired to far higher things than a barren Irish title—"that is, unless one had heaps of money and could get away all the year. You"—she glared down at the slender, ill-dressed figure—"you'd like it."

"I should never care to live anywhere else," said Evie.

"And I"—Nora smiled a little sadly—"I don't believe it matters where you live, as long as it's with someone you're fond of. They, and not outside surroundings, make the grass green and the skies blue."

"And one's spade hand look like no trumppers," interrupted Nita Crophorne fretfully, and with thinly-veiled unbelief. "Ah! here come the men. I'm pining for a gamble."

The men came from the dining-room, a little cheered up now, by port and cigars. Distant sounds of laughter had drifted to the women, for Neill's father unbent in his wife's absence.

Miss Catty woke with a start. Miss Susie ceased listening dreamily to Mrs. Ievers. Standish, getting to the window, made frantic signals to both; nodding at the door, winking, and all rather openly.

But Mrs. Ievers remembered the jewels—she would never lose an opportunity of display. "They must all see them, they were so lovely," she cooed. So there was a searching for keys and departure of the silent Mr. Fielding for the box. Sandy sat down next to Evie, who was bathed in gloom. A party at Droveen made her feel her remoteness from Neill's life; the difference between their show of affluence and the grinding poverty of the Hartland home.

Mrs. Ievers was too sweetly condescending; with fat, bejewelled fingers, she indicated the gulf between—indicated and emphasised. The girl knew, as she sat in the damp drawing-room, that she would never be received there with Mrs. Ievers' consent. Wistfully she dreamt of what it might be, knowing its impossibility. Evie believed she could win the stout, pompous dame to liking her—for Neill's sake.

She passed from passive miseries to those acute, as Sandy sat by her, asking what was the matter.

"Everything's hopeless," she said aloud, afraid that Mrs. Ievers might guess what she was fretting for. "I can't hunt, that brute of a grey thing won't do anything. If only I could have bought O'Neill's chestnut—but £50—where am I to get £50? I'd almost steal for it," she said petulantly, pleasantly conscious of shocking her hostess, who said, "Evie!" in tones of ice.

"If instead of keeping horses you would take my advice," she said reprovingly. "Take up your garden, sell its produce; make lace—endeavour to live suitably. Your grey was evidently an unfortunate purchase."

"Go to market with cabbages," suggested Evie, with mirthless wit. "I couldn't quite do that, Mrs. Ievers, poor as we are."

Acland, thinking of his arrangement, smiled to himself.

Mr. Fielding came back with a small, square case. He laid it on a table near the window, and opened it, lifting out the trays. It was full of old-fashioned valuable things: good diamonds rimmed round locks of hair, or plethoric, uninteresting topazes, fringed gold locketts, set with rubies; thick bracelets, gemmed with splendid emeralds. Heavy, tasteless

things, as offensive to modern taste as mahogany sofas and crimson rep coverings. Some sets of rich pearls, wreaths of flowers and buds; and a clumsy tiara.

Nita Crophorne sniffed over them; heaping the jewels on to the table carelessly.

"Dull, stupid rubbish," she said fretfully. "Imagine going out in fetters of that class. And I can't even sell them. Old Aunt Martha made heirlooms of the things. But these," she added, "are really good."

Mr. Fielding, having carefully replaced the brooches, laid some unset diamonds on the faded, blue velvet of the top. Five—stones of exceptional fire and purity—one very large and beautifully-cut brilliant among them. They winked and glittered on the velvet bed—fair things of light—yet the devil's best advocates.

"If I could even take that," said Nita, pushing the stones about. "It's worth two or three hundreds, isn't it, Mr. Fielding?"

"Quite two," he said.

"One could pawn it so easily too," said Nita Crophorne recklessly. "Even a Jew would give fifty, and no one could trace an unset stone."

Mr. Fielding pressed his thin lips together, and Evie sighed.

"Fifty pounds," she said. "I could buy O'Neill's chestnut if I had it."

"If . . ." — Nita Crophorne's dark eyes lit suddenly, she peered down into the box.

It was just at this point that the jackdaw chose to fall down the chimney. What fate brought a jackdaw out questing for his nest on a raw December day no man could tell. The drawing-room chimney was

their sacred home from April outwards; no fires were ever lighted there after the first breath of spring; so perhaps this special daw came imbued by happy memories, and remained held by temper and curiosity until the smoke overpowered him. This is only surmise. Whatever fate urged, he apparently fainted or lost his balance, and came scuttering down the wide chimney with an accompaniment of harsh, frantic caw-ahs, ca ca caw-ahs, and beating wings, to roll across the dim zone of indifferent fire and arrive in a shower of soot, a new Jove upon the hearth-rug. His arrival created a panic. Standish, observing gloomily that the devil was surely coming down the chimney, managed to overturn a small table and step backwards on Mrs. Ievers foot at one and the same time. The two old ladies shrieked hysterically, the girls screamed; Mrs. Ievers' boomed a hoarse note of anguish, and this and the crashing table, the sudden shower of soot and flapping, scorched bird, upset everyone's nerves.

"A daw and no devil," observed Standish, with unabated sorrow, as he picked up some china remnants; he never considered his hostess's foot.

They gathered round the unfortunate bird. Mrs. Ievers, limping painfully, rang the bell, that a man might come to catch and kill it, but Miss Susie, with a wild outcry—she loved all feathered things—caught it to her best silk dress and carried it from the room . . . the jackdaw squalling amazed protest, and never expecting to see a wife or child again. They flocked to the window to watch Miss Susie emerge upon the steps, put her coal-black bird down, and stand triumphant as, after a moment's indecision, it spread its wings and flew away, while its protectress rubbed black streaks more evenly on to her face. Standish

gathered soot up in a shovel; the fire was a blackened ruin. Mrs. Ievers having quite abandoned all hopes of sympathy for her hurt foot, proceeded to gather her broken china and indulge in the grating amusement of trying to fit it together. Fortunately, it was not valuable.

In the meantime, the box of jewels had been absolutely forgotten. Mr. Fielding, who had fired off a little fusillade of agitated "My! my! mys" during the attack of the daw, now remembered his charge with a start, and turned to see that the box was shut, and Nita Cropthorne was just locking it.

"I shut it up," she said carelessly. "Just as well, wasn't it, Mr. Fielding?"

"Oh, quite," he said, visibly relieved. "It was very thoughtful of you, Miss Cropthorne; that unfortunate bird startled me so completely, that for the moment I forgot all about the jewels—" He hesitated for a moment with his hand on the key. "Scarcely any need to go over them, I should think, Miss Cropthorne? they are all in."

"None, I should say," she returned, yawning. "The daw was the only stranger."

Mr. Fielding put away the key, and was leaving the room with his case, when Mrs. Ievers stopped him.

"As you've got the key the things are quite safe," she said. "Do leave them there, Mr. Fielding. Mrs. de Vere is coming over, and I promised to show them to her."

Nita Cropthorne objected—she said she hated showing her things; she was rather fretful about it, and gave in with so bad a grace that the case was taken away.

Standish had collected his aunts; the waggonette

came round and they bade good-bye to a slightly sulky hostess . . . the drawing-room was powdered with soot, and she still gritted a small Cupid's broken leg against the socket of his arm to see if it would fit. But Nita would have none of it—she pined for Bridge—she must have a game—Neill, Acland, Sir Edmund, herself—they could play until quite late, and as to getting back . . . Acland resented the idea of a three-mile walk in a pour of rain. Graves could motor him home—a little extra distance was nothing on a motor.

Neill fumed visibly—he had, in fact, made a low-toned arrangement with Evie, which included getting over there for tea. Acland protested; Mrs. Ievers froze . . . vainly . . . Miss Crophorne would have her way—if Neill would not play, Standish must, and so it remained.

Evie Hartland, who was fidgeting visibly, breathed a sudden sigh of relief and asked for their trap. They were pressed to stay to watch the game, and Nora, who took an interest in it, rather wanted to, but Evie was determined to go. She faltered various lame excuses concerning business at home, got pink and white alternately, and aimed so clumsy a kick at Nora that she made her step-sister jump with pain, and betrayed the movement to everyone.

Standish, now bathed in deepest gloom, laid curses upon Neill Ievers' blond head. He got out of his coat, packed the old ladies into the trap, and stood glistening with raindrops as the card-table was produced.

"Neill is really busy," his mother spoke for her son. "He told me this morning that he must leave directly after lunch to see about a sheep at Jimmy Macmahon's."

"He told me now a cow at Timmy Punches," said Standish unhappily.

Mrs. Ievers—Neill turned scarlet—said that no doubt he had both animals to attend to; she approved of this budding interest in farming. Standish, observing that he thought Neill must be buying for the Ark, sat down. But by this time light had dawned on him, he had watched the hurried departure of the Misses Hartland and he smiled suddenly, creasing his lined face in unwonted places.

"And Neill"—he rose, going to the door—"there's a fat pig I want you to see at Casey's, and a she-goat at Maguire's, and two calves old Scarlon has—Neill—"

Here Neill said something which sounded like "you be damned," but couldn't have been, as he was a well brought up young fellow.

"And don't get wet, Neill," said Standish, looking into the driving mist, "and—don't forget the dove—Neill—"

Neill got upon his bicycle and shook his fist.

"What about a dove, Mr. Blundell?" asked Mrs. Ievers, in stony majesty.

"Why, for the Ark, of course," observed Standish, in some surprise, while his hostess sniffed.

A bully at heart, she knew she was afraid of him, and also that she could not understand him.

They sat down to play cards—Standish was a fine player; Graves indifferent; Nita Crophorne reckless; Acland bad; but luck swayed and varied so that no one lost or won very much. Nita was in high spirits, her morning's fretfulness had evaporated, her cheeks burnt, and her eyes shone, and she was exceedingly good to look at. Her hands were white,

her nails manicured and polished pinkly. She was a dainty product of civilisation ; yet she failed to dazzle the people she had come amongst. The glare of the footlights is garish to an eye which watches the sun paint the West in amber, crimson, gold, and grey.

She won more than the others, and was as pleased over it as a child.

"Luck—such luck !" she said, as she made a game in no trumps. "Yet last week, on what looked better hands, I could do nothing, and there we played for high stakes. It's pure luck."

"Or absence of anxiety," said Acland shrewdly. "If you were playing for more than you could afford to lose, it probably biassed your judgment. You hesitated then where you risked to-night, simply because it didn't matter. I've seen it so often in London," he added plaintively, rather happy because they didn't despise his play. "Have done it myself."

"Shall we put it down now, then?" observed Standish sadly—Acland was his partner. "I think you must be a bit anxious, Sandy."

Sandy reddened and was silent, and the evening drifted to tea-time, which they took cosily at their card-table, drawn close to the now blazing fire. Mrs. Ievers had left them, abandoning hope when Nita began to smoke, instinct told her the next thing would be the production of Standish's pipe. "How fussy that little Hartland girl was." Nita poured out the tea, and Sandy thought, with a sigh, of the thick, yellow cream which would have appeared at Castleknock. He nibbled stale sponge-cake with a chastened air. "She wouldn't wait a second, though the other one wanted to."

"Evie's down on her luck these days," said Standish, giving his cake to a dog. "She's no horse to hunt."

"Oh, she spoke of that."

Nita rang the bell and asked for cream, waiving aside a faint remonstrance concerning locked dairies.

"Quarter a pound less butter," said Standish sadly, and the man-of-all-work fled with a grin.

"She spoke of that," said Nita. "Wants £50 to buy some chestnut horse. Oh! it's wretched to want money. A pretty little creature, but shockingly got up."

Mrs. Ievers came in, and was made room for.

"Somebody will raise it for her, of course. Can't her sister?" said Nita, talking on.

Standish said emphatically that the Hartlands had about as much chance of raising £50 as he would have of diving round the chimney like the daw.

"You don't realise poverty, Miss Crophorne," he said.

"Oh, don't I?" she interposed, but he waived her aside.

"Poverty which can only have three new dresses when it wants four, which must ask for extra money for Bridge debts; but real worrying poverty clinging to one's coat-tails, coming with the postman in the morning, taking the light out of bright eyes and the hope out of life. That's what the Hartlands know, though they glaze it over and dance on its head, and feed it with little sops, so that it won't eat them up."

"Shocking," said Nita. "Do anything for money, I should think."

She was plainly uninterested, while Graves suggested that Standish grew poetical.

Mrs. Ievers glared at the arriving cream-jug. The butler fled with a premonition of to-morrow's rating heavily on his soul.

"The scald to all misers," he muttered, and was

nearly overturned in the frantic entrance of Mr. Fielding carrying the jewel-case in his hands.

"Miss Cropthorne," he cried out, "the diamond. The big diamond has gone—has been stolen!"

"What!" Nita shot to her feet, declaring it could not be. "It was in the box."

Here she stopped, and they made a concerted rush to look upon the floor.

"Was it in the box when you locked it up?" queried Mr. Fielding hotly.

"I don't know. I presumed that it was; I only turned away for a moment to watch that unfortunate bird."

"That sooty jackdaw attracted all our attentions. It was unpardonable of me, but I really thought it was the—ahem—an apparition. Now the diamond has gone—"

"Fallen! No one would have taken it," said Graves sharply. "It's impossible."

"Miss Hartland—the young one—and I were by the table when the bird came down. We looked, of course, and cried out, and then when it was all over I shut and locked up the box." Nita got up from the damp carpet and drummed her fingers on the table.

"It must be there. It must—"

But it was not. They lifted out every tray, opened every case; the big, glistening stone was not among the sets of jewels.

"I opened the case to go over the things," said Fielding. "They were in my charge. If I had only done so down here."

They stood silent. The diamond was not on the floor. It had lain in the centre of the box; even a slight jar would not have tilted it out. It had been

there, winking its crystal purity, when the bird commenced its descent. Sandy remembered that.

Then, as a clammy fog descends on the earth, suspicion came, nebulous as the fog, chill and hideous as its murk. Who wanted money? Who had been near the jewel-case?

"I turned away, of course," said Miss Crophorne, explaining elaborately. "I wasn't looking."

The fog thickened. Mrs. Ievers drew in her hard lips. Mr. Fielding's face was openly troubled. He searched on mechanically, rucking his trouser's knees as he crawled about the floor.

"It must rest," said Nita Crophorne harshly. "I won't have anything done about it."

She really looked troubled.

The lawyer, peering at them from a shadowy corner, was of opinion that the matter did not rest with Miss Crophorne. The jewels were hers in trust; they were willed on to others in the event of her not marrying or having children.

Here Miss Crophorne blushed, and Sandy thought the law chose its words ambiguously.

"In fact, I don't know where we stand," said Mr. Fielding, kneeling out to them at a rapid shuffle.

Standish saw it, Mrs. Ievers and her husband saw it, Fielding and Graves saw it. Only Sandy would have as soon thought of suspecting his own hands of theft as bright Evie Hartland. The others pieced things together. The girl longed for money; had been near the case, with everyone's attention taken from it. What was easier than to catch up the diamond and then slip away?

They hesitated, not knowing what to do. Mr. Fielding urged instant procuring of police; but it was delicate. One cannot search and suspect guests

at a house. He saw it too, after a time, and muttered, fuming.

"I will do nothing. It must be found," said Nita again. "It must be found, Mr. Fielding."

"The question is—where?" he answered crossly. "An unset diamond is almost impossible to trace."

"Oh!" said Nita, and smiled suddenly.

"It is of no particular cutting or colour. One could walk into a jeweller's, say it had fallen from a ring, and sell it. It will take time to search for. It would attract no suspicion if taken by a l—" He stopped, looking at Standish, afraid to finish. "—By a respectable person," he concluded.

And all the time Nita Crophorne's cheeks glowed, and her eyes flashed, as if the loss were nothing to her. She bore it well—where another girl might have been angry. Graves admired her for it, and said so, before he went to agitate the bowels of his dormant motor. Miss Crophorne shrugged her broad shoulders.

"Can't have a row here—among strangers," she said sweetly, but her eyes were expressive.

Mrs. Ievers talked fast; the cold suspicion grew as a snowball. Who had wanted money . . . who had been near the box? She knew.

"It's mislaid," insisted Nita, peering absently among the broken china.

Mr. Fielding, dusty and dirty, thought otherwise, he muttered, as he continued his search. His thin lips were hopeless.

The motor throbbed into life; and they left Droveen in a storm of pitiless, driving rain; blurring the powerful lamps and making progress dangerous.

Phillips, who had not gone back in the waggonette, occupied the back seat with his master.

"Exceedingly dangerous, sir," he remarked cheerfully, as the lights showed the black wall of dripping night.

The gates came suddenly upon them, a narrow, iron-guarded gap; the road was only visible before the circle of the lamps glare.

"Very," said Sandy nervously, as they turned to climb a long ascent, and the car throbbed in protest.

"Exceedingly strange occurrence, sir," said Phillips, in lower tones. "Most unpleasant for all of you there, sir—the—suspicion—"

"Go to the devil, Phillips," said Acland, and swallowed a mouthful of cold rain.

"Certainly, sir," said Phillips, raising his coat-collar; he had got a waterproof.

Graves steered nervously, wishing himself at home. He too spoke of the diamond.

"Awkward. Hanged awkward he growled, knowing who would be suspected. "*Who* could have taken it, Standish?"

"None of us," said Standish shortly. "Keep on the road, man, and you'll live the longer."

An old woman in a cart bleated shrilly before the car's advance. They avoided her; all but killed a prowling goat, and nerve shaken, got forward.

"I'm a poor man," said Standish suddenly, "but I'd pay the value of the stone myself to see it back in its box."

Standish knew too by now. His gloomy, deep-set eyes took in most things. Mrs. Ievers disliked him because she knew he read her thoroughly—saw through her mask of complacency down to the spiteful self beneath.

"Why we ever go there to be poisoned by bad food and drink, and be waited on by a poor devil of

a coachman, and be patronised by a shopkeeper's daughter, beats me. I do it to please the aunts. What a night!"

A fresh burst of rain was upon them, whipped forward by a roaring blast. The road wound tortuously along the slope of the hill.

Graves steered absently, thinking deeply. Opportunity makes thieves and men. This might be his. He might establish a right over Evie; make her by gratitude his to take when he chose.

So thinking he turned too sharply, went too fast at the incline, and stuck handsomely in the gate at Ballymacshane. Phillips and Acland fell upon each other in a tangle of outraged humanity. Standish got out hurriedly—on his shoulder—though he always declared he jumped, and the 20 h.p. Panhard buzzed in impotent wrath against the wall—its machinery much damaged and shaken. It remained at the gate a wreck, while they went wetly up the avenue, and Graves stayed for the night.

"Terribly poor house, sir, Droveen," observed Phillips, clasping Sandy's links. "A chop each for dinner, and one short, as I was not expected."

"Very unfortunate, Phillips," said his master, with sympathy.

"Very—for the butler, sir. He was last, sir," said Mr. Phillips gravely. "Everything counted, sir, down to the helpings at table. Cooks always leaving, sir, unable to cope with it. Your tonic, sir."

"Oh, do be quiet about people's houses, Phillips," said Sandy, gulping quinine. "Can't have unlimited waste everywhere. Don't talk!"

"Certainly, sir; very bitter. Induces faces, sir. Thank you, sir," said Phillips urbanely.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW ACLAND SAW AN OLD HOME AND WENT TO A TEA-PARTY

"Feel sharply, hear plainly, see clearly,
Past days with their joys and their pain."

—GORDON.

FOR a man of the world and a shrewd dealer in stocks and shares, Sandy Acland was singularly obtuse. He enlarged on the story of the lost diamonds to the Misses Blundell, who, on their part, were sure some draught or passing shock had swept them from the box on to the floor, and none of them dreamt of Evie being suspected. She was one of the Blundell's blood; a lady, and a guest.

"I'm sure they'd like to think I did it," chuckled Sandy pleasantly, "at least Mrs. Ievers would. The woman ought to have been the queen of small state, rather than a mere country squire's wife, with a desire to appear rich."

Acland could speak sharply upon some subjects; his complete ignorance of horse-flesh led him into mirth-making error, but he could study humanity of Helen Ievers' type and apprise it at its true value. In some way, he associated her with Kathleen's persecution—Mrs. Ievers had been her mother's great friend, though a younger woman than Mrs. Blundell—

and not without foundation, he imagined advice given and received.

"Mrs. Ievers will be Lady Clandounes," said Graves pompously, not approving of this depreciation of county magnates.

"She will then possibly burst, like the frog in the fable," suggested Sandy. "I've eaten her lunch, but I refuse to like her."

Sir Edmund Graves snorted haughtily. He did not approve of the language from a mere little London business person. Titles were things to be revered in their place.

"Mr. Acland is pleased to be severe," he remarked sharply. "No doubt he comes from such high society that we seem very small people. He is careful in Ireland that he may launch out in London." This a hit at the Englishman's miserly ways, his weighing of doubtful letters, applications for darning of socks, cheerfully done by Miss Catty.

"I was speaking of humanity, not society," returned Sandy quietly. "One is reality, the other a name."

"Fair hit," said Slandish, with enjoyment.

"You might make a coal-heaver Lord de Charbon," went on the little man thoughtfully, "but you couldn't give him decent hands and feet, or a look of breeding. I spoke without thinking of Mrs. Ievers' future niche in the peerage."

Graves snorted again; it was monotonous, and not convincing; but he could not think of anything else to do. Sandy Acland on a horse or in a trap was a fool to be laughed at; but as a man who chose to argue, he was more than a match for the stay-at-home Irishman. A life in London may leave one ignorant of fox-hunting, but it tends to enlarge one's view of life.

Sandy looked up from the depth of the comfortable chair which Miss Blundell had bestowed on him as his own. They lavished affection on their polite little guest. Graves' features were clearly outlined, the light full on them. A mean, narrow face, with hard eyes and a thin mouth.

Kathleen, always Kathleen—the thought ran in Sandy's head—there was no bond because they had loved the same woman. This man, young then, his hair unflecked with grey—had pursued her—urged her—unwilling—to marry him, thinking only of his own desire. Until, bright-faced, impulsive, brooking no shadow of displeasure or coercion, she had fled to her death; to starve—rather than own herself beaten. Bitter memory to the man who might have saved her.

Now Graves desired again—and the girl was unwilling. Did resistance charm him, when so many women would have asked nothing better than to be "My Lady Graves," and twist their plastic emotions into love for a good-looking and rich man? So many women can call up affection at will. No; he must needs lay his choice on finer natures, who construed love humanly and therefore sadly; who weighed no comfortable life and titled husband in the balance against the aching throb of loving hearts, the ever-present fear of loss; the cup of pure bliss with its bitter dregs, which those who can really feel know for their doom and their crown.

Standish turned the conversation to hunting, and the two men bickered through dinner; though Graves was now the batter and Sandy the bail. For, to the covert hits concerning tailors—the sneers at ignorance—the little man had no response. He listened uncomprehending to floods of unnecessary

technicalities, and fidgeted, sighing; realising that silence was his part amid these tales of horse and hound.

Standish, who quite appreciated the cause of sudden flow of driving and casting, and concerning hounds; of laminitis and tetanus concerning horses, gave a sudden dry opinion that a new book, "Graves upon the Horse," should certainly be written, and winked with unconcealed contortion at Sandy.

"Faith, now, Sandy had better tell you how he buys stocks and shares," said Standish, the observant, mustering a grin. "There are Bulls and Bears in it, I know—for I've seen the stories in the sixpenny magazines—kept in cages, I suppose, in the Stock Exchange."

Sandy gave a shocked "Dear me!" and suddenly remembered that he had omitted to wire an important reply to Mr. Jones, his clerk. Clearly Ireland was not conducive to business regularity. He immediately summoned Phillips, directing that worthy to be at Ballymacshane Post Office before eight, and inscribed a cypher on the paper with much contrition. If Mr. Jones had waited they had probably lost several hundred pounds; if Mr. Jones had not waited he had taken too much on himself.

Hit—goose—five—apple—wild-fowl. Sir Edmund took it up. "How extraordinary."

"Most distressing to Miss Punch, sir, at Ballymacshane. In last, which was 'Give goose pears.' I could scarcely persuade her not to alter it. She said 'twas—ah—agin nather an' the divil's waste entirely, sir."

"Phillips!" reproved Sandy, as he took a neat copy in his pocket-book. "Apple is thousand," he said to Graves. "Five the figure."

"Hit means, then—?" asked Graves.

"In our present code, sell. Give is buy. Goose stands for a certain affair on the market. We rearrange the code frequently, and each keep a key.—Have this in time, Phillips, and be careful to warn Miss Punch the alteration of a word might spell disaster."

"Certainly, sir. Miss Punch, sir, thinks we wire too much about geese at present, sir. She says they are only five shillings a couple here, without telegraphing to London, and fruit feeding thim, sir." Mr. Phillips' careful rendering of the Irish words in his own accent was rather delightful. "In fact, she is sending her aunt with two couples, sir—"

"Oh, go away, Phillips—sixpence," said Acland, engrossed in figures.

"Certainly, sir," said Phillips, leaving.

Graves' face was thoughtful. He saw Acland in another light—a precise, careful little person who risked thousands on a deal.

"Telegram for you, sir," said Mr. Phillips, returning. "Miss Punch brought it herself."

Acland read and his face cleared. It was to the effect that Mr. Jones had feared to wait. He had sold and realised something handsome. Acland noted it down. This was excellent; but he objected to Mr. Jones doing such very big deals without advice. A long communication full of geese and fruit lay on the table.

Acland wrote another wire, tearing up the previous one. "The answer," he said, counting out ninepence regretfully. He had just made £1,000.

"Miss Punch has brought a goose, sir. She hopes you'll keep it and save expense." Phillips delivered the message gravely

"Tell her to go to the dickens, Phillips," snapped Acland.

Phillips was leaving when Standish produced half-a-crown.

"Tell Miss Punch Mr. Acland's obliged," he said gloomily, "especially as pears are threepence each in London."

They left the dining-room and went to Standish's room. Graves, saying he had dropped his handkerchief, went back to the dining-room. He found it, and swept the torn slips of paper from the table, piecing them together.

"Might be useful," he said slowly. "One never knows."

Graves, having lain on his back in the mud and sworn mightily, was able to retreat in the morning on the resuscitated Panhard. It presented the battered appearance of a man who had been doing a few rounds without the gloves; but it slid away pleasantly.

Yesterday's rain had passed; feathery clouds sailed softly in a sky of washed-out blue; the fields were soddenly wet; silver pools lay in every hollow. Sandy Acland had dedicated the day to an expedition—that of seeing Kathleen's birthplace, Glencarron—a now deserted house; he was going there with Nora Hartland. Evie was a thing to be kept for merry moments; Nora someone to turn to when the heart was sad. He called for her, driving the sedate Iceland, and they drove off together from Castleknock gate under a soft flare of winter sun.

"Evie has gone to Cork for the day." Nora proceeded at intervals to administer business-like whacks to the shaggy pony. "She fled off this morning—

poor child"—Nora sighed a little as she spoke—"and O'Neill's nephew is at the house with his chestnut declaring he means to sell it to her. I told him it was useless—vainly. He has his own ways, he says."

Acland blushed and jogged the pony's mouth.

"And what an upset at Droveen! A messenger came over to ask us about the stone. Of course we knew nothing. Neill was there—his tale of pigs and sheep all betrayed—and was annoyed at being found at Castleknock."

Sandy told all he knew about the missing jewel; dismissing all probable theories as impossible.

"It fell down," he said, "or Miss Cropthorne picked it up and let it fall when the daw came." There they dropped the subject. Nita Cropthorne's jewels did not touch them.

The road dipped into a valley, crossed an arm of the hills, and turned to Glencarron gates. Rusted, melancholy things, rooted deep into the grass-grown track. The laurels branched almost across the avenue. It was dark and neglected—a record of the past. The house lies high, guarded from the lawn by a swing gate. Inside this it was more melancholy still. Weed-grown flower-beds; unclipt shrubs; spiky mummies of long-lived perennials nosing up through the grass; a damp, green sweep; shuttered blind windows. To the right terraces dip, once shaven and smooth, now occupied by peaceful sheep which Catty's "wough" sent into huddled terror.

Standing, Acland peopled it with Kathleen—ever bright-faced, sunny-haired, flying over those terraces, riding up by the swing gate, stooping to open it! peeping from open windows; always high-spirited, even in the face of trouble . . . Graves, young then, but tall and lean. cast a shadow

across the picture — Kathleen's mother welcoming him, and then he saw the end. The girl's last drive down to the station, with proud eyes and aching heart, as she fled from it all, to make her fortune and defy them. Her fortune; poor, foolish, big-hearted child, with her tiny borrowed capital sewn up inside her dress, and death, had she known it, holding out welcoming hands.

The little man's eyes were dark as he looked round; but it was a dead and gentle grief. A little wraith to lift upon one's knee in the twilight, dropping soft tears upon its head, until the lights came, and one turned to creamy tea and hot, buttered toast. No reality, grim and grave, to stalk beside us in sunshine and storm, to curb us with a twitch of agony after a moment's forgetfulness; to haunt our pillows, pitiless for the hard gasp sobs and bitter tears which daylight must not see; and lay gripping leaden hands about our hearts as we wake to the pain of another day. The hopeless, hidden grief, which gnaws and saps, and often kills its victim, who, happy at the thought of release, stretches worn hands to the death which must give peace.

Nora, watching him, knew it for a dead sorrow, but spoke now and again, helping his vision of the past.

"Kathleen's favourite seat"—a mossy, now rotten bench—"I've seen her there, all her glorious hair ablaze in the sunshine. Kathleen's room," she pointed to a crazy shutter.

Sandy's eyes were wet as he left the place, coming down to the swing gate. He stood; the winter light clear on his saddened face, thin now and growing brown, the petty lines of routine smoothing out. It

was a kind face, and Nora watched him closely. Length of limb, the art and grace of horsemanship are not everything.

"I—I can understand Kathleen," she said, very softly; and as the accent was not complimentary, it was perhaps fortunate that the little man did not hear.

"He teased her—worried her," he burst out. "Were they actually unkind to her, Miss Nora?"

"It was unkindness to her; they never understood her. They were very angry with the child, unable to understand how she could turn away from Castletown Graves; and Sir Edmund pressed her unmercifully. They sold her hunter; tried to make her feel poverty; said she must do it, and she, Kathleen—I was here—she stormed out at them, went off to Standish, and left, shaking the dust of the place off her feet. Her mother never understood her. Both women, you say. A canal, crawling decorously between its made banks, a beast of burden to man's will; a rippling, tearing river, flashing over rapids, pouring swift into its depths; a thing of light and shade, self-willed and irresistible; they, too, are both water, but apart as moon and earth. Kathleen died—of want—and then—her mother, knowing it, never recovered the knowledge, but died herself, heart-broken. Lack of understanding, Sandy, is at the bottom of most of our troubles. If Nature studied Nature, if those who could give happiness to others would do so, what a world it would be. We'd have the Millenium half-penny circular in a month—fully advertised."

She spoke the last words lightly, but her eyes were sad. She was so pretty standing there, her

shabby coat and hard cap unable to mar the soft outlines of her face, the brightness of grey eyes which had never grown old, the contour of a profile which defied the years. Nora Hartland would grow grey and infirm, but youth would dance with her to the end.

Acland sighed. Evie was distractingly pretty—she openly favoured him—but—if it were otherwise. If it were Nora, what a friend and companion, what peace and love might be given to a man whom she might care for.

The Iceland was whipped unwillingly homewards. They found Standish awaiting them.

"The house is humming at Droveen," he said. "It's the most unfortunate thing. The last time I'll take luncheon there. Where's Evie?"

"Gone to Cork," said Nora, as she poured out tea. "Why?"

"Don't bellow at me, Standish. She wouldn't say why—some business of her own. She was in very low spirits starting. Why? Oh, I don't know. She stole a badly-needed sovereign from me and caught an early train."

Standish grunted over his tea, his forehead knitted; the straws at Droveen had shown but too plainly how the wind blew. They suspected the girl. Nita Crophorne was the most unmoved; she seemed more pleased than pained at her loss. Mr. Ievers looked darkly; Mr. Fielding shrugged angry shoulders, and nothing was done.

"What a day she chose for it," snapped out Standish angrily.

"An exceedingly fine day," said Sandy reprovingly. "No rain or wind."

Standish, biting a heavily-buttered cake, remarked

that some people couldn't see beyond their own noses, and that was a restricted line.

This was a distinct disparagement of a snub feature, so Sandy reddened and took some more tea, knowing resentment to be in vain. He drove back with his lazy pony, still unsuspecting ; to spend his evening reading, for Standish was buried in thought, and declined conversation.

There was another party next day, a gathering at a local parson's, to which they were bidden. Standish would not go ; Miss Susie had a cold, and Miss Catty stayed with her ; so Sandy lurched gently in the empty waggonette until he picked up the Hartlands, whom they were taking. The thing was called a book tea, Sandy having consulted Standish, who suggested a soaped bath-sponge, and could get no further, was racked by doubt, and finally gave it up.

Evie wrestled with an elaborate collection of small sacks inscribed with various groceries. Nora carried two flags in her hat, and wore a superior smile—daring all men to guess.

"It is childish," said Sandy, in his precise way. "It is so very palpably under two Flags—"

But he tasted the joys of giving before they left Castleknock. Evie, a radiant vision of youth, positively danced upon the steps.

"The chestnut," she said. "I've got the chestnut. O'Neill's nephew came over, and he swopped, Sandy, for the mare. Took her away ; said he had a buyer for her 'likes,' so there I am now with the chestnut to ride on Friday. I knew that grey mare was worth money."

She pivouetted agilely upon one heel, nearly upsetting Nora, who remonstrated with feeling, and

they started, Evie prattling of her horse. It was a dream; a gift from the fairies. Who could have imagined the grey mare being worth so much? The chestnut was even sound; a month old certificate clearing possible ailments.

Evie wore a cheap hat, and her one best coat and skirt; but she was a vision of absolute radiance against the background of the sombre day.

The parson's house was already full to overflowing; a wave of voices poured from the congested doorway; a reek of hot, tea-stricken air hit them hard as they passed into the hall. Sandy abandoned the contest from the very commencement: he was content to hold a small card in his hand; but he never dreamt of the familiarity of peering at strange ladies' shoulders—could have slain a mild curate who lifted with a lingering touch each packet of Evie's groceries, and then, unmoved by her nearness, decided peevishly that books upon trade were not permissible. This youthful parson carried a bulky Mudie catalogue, and sweated hard for the plated match-box which constituted first prize. Old ladies queried; young ones giggled; the air was thick with literature.

Thick too, as aspirants realised their failures, with the tale of the lost diamonds. It circled from group to group; gathered momentum as it sped.

Evie, moving merrily, guessing unwisely, was suddenly aware of something strange. People looked at her, whispering as she passed. Friendly faces were cold; once her outstretched hand was ignored. Looking through the crowd at the beginning she had met Mrs. Ievers. Nita's mother was never gushing, but to-day she took the semblance of a silk-clad iceberg as she towered above a heedless little boat.

They paused. Miss Crophorne's somewhat haggard beauty was framed by a great hat, and toned by powder—she spoke to Evie.

"Never found the diamond," she said. "Tell me, you were near it with me as I put it back. Didn't you see it again?"

Evie shook her head.

"No-o," she answered. "I remember now I glanced in again just before you shut the box, and did not notice the big stone. Before that, one always saw it blaze."

"Very curious." Nita yawned. "I'm off to London to-morrow. I've business there."

Her dark eyes flashed as she spoke; clearly the loss had not troubled her.

Mrs. Ievers listened with a grim face.

Neill was close to her. To him, Evie burst out in her joy, telling of the chestnut.

"Such a beauty!" she said. "I never dreamt of such luck."

Mrs. Ievers swung round; she was talking to a hawk-nosed, hatched-faced woman, a local magnate with a bitter tongue.

"You got the chestnut. I thought," she said, in her superior way, "that you were unable to buy a horse, Evelyn."

"I didn't buy him. I hadn't a penny. O'Neill swopped him for the grey."

"For the grey. A wild, worthless brute!"

The story sounded lame as the mare had been. O'Neill's nephew was not a fool. Sandy, standing by, smiled to himself, wondering how much they would believe. Evie looked on it as a mere tribute to her good judgment in buying the grey filly.

Mrs. Ievers said nothing, but her chill eyes flashed

sudden understanding. Neill—they had not been able to make their hints plain to Neill—came nearer to Evie.

"You're like a ray of sunshine to-day," he said, his head bent close to the groceries, his fingers touching them. "Whither away yesterday so early?" he asked aloud. "You looked troubled."

"To Cork," said Evie, and blushed suddenly.

"You went to Cork yesterday."

"To—get—a tooth stopped," the girl said, and somehow the lie was palpable.

She looked more pleased with the result than anyone has a right to be with the outcome of half an hour under soft, torturing fingers, the gritting, nerve-shattering horror of the whirling wheel and subsequent gulps of tepid water. Her eyes sparkled as with some pleasant recollection. Mrs. Ievers' glance met Mrs. de Vere's almost instinctively; cruel understanding in both. So the tale was whispered on until Evie, lacking all understanding, felt this cold wave of fog, and met with the gloom which puzzled her. Books lost interest to the gossips who love to rend a reputation in beak and claw. The ignored hand was palpable; it left Evie red-cheeked and amazed. She drew into a corner alone, letting the chatterers, flushed by hot tea and lack of air, drift by. Nita Cropthorne sailed about, radiant in deep cream; dazzling county eyes with last year's London finery. Her red hair waved about her face in set waves and curls, her long, lace-collared throat was hung with beads and pearls; magnificent sables on her shoulders. She was so fine in all her elaborated claims to beauty, so complete in her assertion to the right, that one passed by the items . . . wrinkles, and brown, powdered skin,

... and merely recognised the gorgeous whole. Only Sandy, accustomed to the type day by day, failed to feel impressed. The London girl moved her rustling silks, shrugging wide shoulders at the questioning eager prize-seekers.

"I—oh, I'm nothing," she drawled at the dazzled curate, who buried his nose in the scented laces. "I've no brains for competition," and flashed dark eyes on him, making him forget the match-box.

Graves came up. Nita, in her high drawl, told him she was off to town. Her spirits were high. She shot out bright-edged speeches happily.

Poor Evie, from her corner, looked straight into a long glass. It reflected her coat and skirt, stamped immediately with the brand of county making; her one silk blouse, getting a little faded. Her ill-poised cheap hat, her badly puffed out hair. The image was flanked by the town girl in her cream and sables, with the flash of jewels and droop of costly plumes. Neill was thrown with one, he saw the other by stealth; the demon of bitter jealousy gripped Evie by the throat, stifling her, hurting her horribly. She saw significance in Neill's way of handing Miss Crophorne's tea and chocolate cakes (the icing was melted), in the raising of the dark eyes to his, the sensuous turn of the long throat. Tricks so old that they came by instinct; Nita Crophorne knew her world too well to miss a moment's opportunity. Soft hearts are fertile ground for a few crops of minor presents; theatre and luncheon tickets, even if one never dreamt of marrying their possessor. Stiff girls did not have good times. So though Neill, so far as she knew, was never likely to produce anything she wanted; she sowed this wealth of her fascination lavishly, and Evie watched and suffered.

She came from her corner, going to tea with Sandy, drinking the weak stuff unwillingly, and letting jealousy embitter her slice of cake. It died a second later; Neill discovered a thirst for more tea, he left Miss Crophorne and came to her, unaware of offence. This death of a new-born pain made room for the fog of that sleeping coldness. A little bandboxy girl came in, standing close to them. A trim and well-seasoned maiden, with red, tip-tilted nose and vinegar mouth. Evie greeted her carelessly; they were neighbours and friends. Carrie Bevans flushed; she turned away; she pursued with absorbing interest a certain cake at the far end of the table, ignoring Evie. The girl flushed hotly—it—they—she bit the complaint off and buried its bitterness, wondering what she had done; what story some friend had manufactured about her. A guilty conscience spoke of the stolen horse; pricks of sweet memory of meetings with Neill; absolutely puzzled, she let it alone and watched the sudden buzz of the adjudication. Humanity loves to strive and gain, from prizes at book teas, to a V.C. snatched from red-handed war. The competitors crowded, arguing and quarrelling—the long-nosed curate came to them in high dudgeon, reproached Evie for her vagueness.

Nora, pink-cheeked and laughing, came across.

"Disqualified," she said mournfully. "Because when everyone said I was under Two Flags, I told them I was Misunderstood. As for Evie, it would take a wise man to make Many Cargoes out of her bundle of coffee and sugar, coal and butter."

It was a very vapid amusement, and its best part the ending. Fresh air whooped at them with polite contempt as they reached the waggonette. Graves' motor buzzed among the horses, and he offered to

take Evie home. She had detected the note of coldness even in her hostess's good-bye.

"No, thank you." Evie, dispirited, made her way to the waggonette.

"And look here, Evie"—his thin face bent close to hers—"if there's trouble, why not come to me?"

"There is no trouble, and I don't understand any of you," said Evie fretfully, getting in by Nora. "Come, Sandy."

She turned, as women will, to her hurt, directly they started. Nita, in a dark fur coat, had been on the steps as they left.

"How—how lovely she looks in those clothes," said shabby Evie, buttoning her old mackintosh.

Sandy expressed an apt but improper retort and remarked in his precise way that "Miss Crophorne had been, no doubt, extremely pretty ten years ago. At present she is like her dress—a little *passé*," he said, unaware of the blissful gratitude he was earning.

"She's ten years younger than I am," said Nora bluntly.

"You have not lived her life," said Acland. "Late hours, constant excitement, artificial sleep. The years might be the other way, Miss Nora. She looks gorgeous here. I've seen her in town; she is nothing to notice."

It was enough to make Evie gush at him; her face soft in the dimness, her voice a caress. Nita was no siren then, but a London girl of passable good looks. Although a nice woman will not pick a possible rival to pieces, she will kiss the hand which does it for her. In all the sweetness which was poured upon him—the ready-tongued Irish flattery which is so perfect that it arms guised as truth—could Sandy be blamed for seeing falsely? Nora sat aloof; Evie close to

him, her pretty face turned up to his. His £40, carefully noted in his cheque-book as drawn to M. O'Neill for self, seemed nothing to him. He drove home with a brain which would whirl, and the Misses Hartland watched him go.

"Evie, you—you're trying to turn the little man's head," said Nora sharply.

"At his age! Impossible!" returned Evie, with the intolerance of twenty. "Besides, he was in love with Kathleen."

"And so was Edmund Graves."

"Nora," said Evie, abandoning the argument, "what law have I transgressed? Two or three people wouldn't speak to me to-day. What can I have done?"

"Some madcap freak," said Nora. "Pulling country propriety's nose—I can't think, Evie. Shut out the night."

"Who cares. I'll hunt and jump on Friday," trilled Evie, to the unsympathetic hall door. A rheumatic person who groaned as it came to. "And keep near Neill," sang her heart, to her sympathetic self.

"Who cares," she repeated, slamming the door. "There's a pheasant for dinner. Tim was out shooting near Droveen."

But she went in wondering what it meant.

CHAPTER XV

A FOG AND A MOON

"I remember the snort and the stag-like bound
Of the steed six lengths to the fore."

—GORDON.

"TOM wishes to know, sir, if you won't ride Robin to-day?"

I shall not," said Acland briefly.

His voice was acquiring a new note of decision, to be used with emphasis in conjunction with the Robin.

"Tom says, sir, he regrets he cannot do so himself, as he is obliged to take the new brown mare after hounds to-day. Mr. Blundell wishes it." Phillips fidgeted. "Says it is exceedingly bad for Robin, sir, not to get as much hunting exercise as possible to reduce his high spirits, sir. 'Leppin' out of his skhin entirely,' Tom says he was yesterday."

Acland grunted, not over-well pleased. The Robin was very beautiful to look at; but he was not the class of animal which a timid man wishes to ride. The humping strong back and tucked-down tail, the latter revolving itself into a whirl of swishing hair when the horse plunged, were not tempting.

"Some boy must ride him," said the Robin's owner thoughtfully.

Mr. Phillips laid down a bath-towel with great

precision, he topped the fat sponge with a cake of soap set exactly in the middle, then he spoke :

"I could ride him to the meet, sir, if you wished," he said diffidently. "Merely as exercise and to accustom him to the excitement of seeing hounds."

"Phillips!" said Acland, sitting up in bed. "Are you mad?"

"Certainly, sir," said Phillips, with urbane confusion.

"You ride him? How the—the—"

"Exactly, sir; on his back, sir," said Phillips hastily. "Quite in the ordinary way, sir. Mr. Blundell, sir, has given me an old breeches, sir."

Acland sat up petrified. He stroked his shaven upper lip, and regarded his pattern valet with amazed eyes. Phillips—poised upon the wild young chestnut riding to the meet, arrayed in Standish's old clothes. Phillips—the immaculate and immovable, in all human probability bucked off and lying in the mud. Phillips—who, had his master known, always took hansoms on wet days in town, and evened their charges over hair-polish and laces.

"You can—go—to the devil," was upon Acland's lips, but he checked it. Phillips presented the appearance of a naughty child asking for sweets.

"You can go, Phillips," he said, almost tragically. "I presume it's your own neck, Phillips; but I expect you to mind my horse."

"Certainly, sir; thank you, sir," said Phillips, relapsing into valet-like gravity. But he got outside to run downstairs at such a pace that he all but upset Standish, who was the earliest of risers. "Deeply regret it, sir," said Phillips, breathing hard; 'but I've got leave to hunt, sir, in your breeches, sir, on the Holy Robin, sir," and he vanished.

"Nero's Egyptian grandmother," observed Standish, using classical history over-freely. "What next?"

He and Sandy were driving; the "next" was the triumphal start of Mr. Phillips (watched from a back window by his master) in breeches two sizes too large, a pair of Tom's gaiters, an immaculately neat blue coat and waistcoat, and a villainous old tweed cap. Ellie, the kitchen-maid, stuffed sandwiches into his pockets, telling him in a high voice that he looked grand entirely; and she had the breast of the chicken cut up for him, for when 'twas rin through the mincer, the mather and Mr. Acland wouldn't never mind the differ of the legs. The cook appeared with hard-boiled eggs. Clearly, Phillips was a favourite. Blackbird came dottering out on her stiff joints, Tom appeared on a snorting, wild-eyed mare, and the Robin elected to leave the yard at a head-and-tail-in-air prance; exceeding showy, but not disturbing.

"Great Heavens!" said Acland, going down to his breakfast. "Great Heavens! How has the man learnt to do it? Sitting there," he told Standish, "perfectly at his ease, even when the animal bounded quite high. While I—" he shook a retrospective head, recalling his own dismay when Blackbird shied mildly.

He got into his coat and the trap in a glow of anticipation, nevertheless; the love of hunting now deep in him. Hopes of another triumph sparkled in his eyes. He would get away first once more; charge large obstacles—they were all the same to Blackbird—and hear the flower of the hunt thudding in his wake. Not quite so easy a thing to do as Sandy Acland imagined—especially in Ireland.

The meet was on a narrow road, a belt of thick trees running at one side, and of unkempt laurels at

the other. It was very still, and a white mist clung clammily, beading the laurel leaves, chilling fingers and feet ; making distances interminable and vision vague. Phillips on the now excited, foam-flecked Robin, disappeared into the crowd as they came up, and proceeding which puzzled his master, but made Tom smile. The face of the world was changed down here. No lines of fences, solid and green, or lace of boughs and thorn ; but wall upon wall ; loose grey lines, crossing and recrossing the poor, light land. Sometimes the stones cropped through the surface, a scarring, unwelcome eruption. There was not a tree in sight except those they had met at the start. The land ran humping and bare to the grey horizon.

Mount Hilyard was blank, no foxes lying in the woods ; but they found in a clump of gorse outside ; a little dark-green patch deep in a hollow between two hills. Blackbird pricked her ears at the first note ; she tore her head from her rider's hands, when a small red object slipped up the far slope, and the echoes were woke by the chorus behind him. Acland would have sat down to ride if he had known how ; as it was, he chirruped cheerfully in the manner of maiden ladies who drive themselves, and set to work to get as near the now flying pack as he could. They were pouring up the field close on their fox. But scent, that most mysterious of things, was catchy and bad ; the little red fox was a cunning wight, who twisted and swung, looking for the holes he knew of. Hounds flashed over it just across the road, not a quarter of a mile from where they started ; and Acland, who had not been as far in front as he desired, thought it a favourable opportunity to jump the wall of the road, and land in the middle of them

Judging by the sudden flood of language which rolled high over the fence, and overwhelmed him, he appeared to have done wrong. He turned a mild and puzzled face of inquiry, wondering what it could be. Last day he had been applauded because he had been nearest to the pack. To-day he had endeavoured to show an apparently hesitating field that the wall off the road was nothing: he was cursed for it.

"I simply wished to be near the dogs," he observed, with dignity, when Gervase stopped to take breath.

"Pressing them. Jump on them! You—you London—"

"Stockbroker," prompted Acland kindly.

A good deal of laughter drowned the master's bad language, and Mr. Acland rode apart with dignity, considering the ways of fox-hunting.

"Yo-li!" yelled someone to the right. "He's into covert again."

He was not, however, into covert, but twisting and turning outside it; crossing a small, close country, with low stone walls, and trappy, overgrown ditches, and nothing to stop anyone. The novice to it all found himself engulfed at beaten-down gaps among a crowd of people, pushing frantically because there was no hurry. He was conscious of jumping too close to the horses in front, and also that sundry men on woolly youngsters jumped a great deal too close to him. There was no peace and no progression; and a never-ending difficulty with the fly fences. Blackbird went fast at them, checked herself, and bucked over; so did Acland, gripping the back of the saddle, and learning to dread the thump with which he met the pigskin as they landed. It was a tiresome hunt, as they doubled and checked and

galloped, now into the domain, scent better under the trees, and leaving it again, and into another wood with a hideous obstacle of wall and ditch out of it, over which Acland's legs flapped wide, and nothing but Blackbird's extreme consideration could have kept him on. Then it ended at an unstopped hole with a sigh of relief from more than one man. So far Acland had not seen Phillips and the chestnut, but believed them to have remained decorously upon the road, as he had intended to direct Phillips to do. As they jogged along the narrow, lonely roads to the next draw, he looked round for his horse and man, and observed them, both looking extremely hot, in the rear. He drew back to inquire about the Robin.

"He is covered with perspiration, Phillips," said Acland reprovingly.

"Certainly, sir; warm day, sir," said Phillips happily. "Exceedingly fretful horse when you restrain him, sir."

"Be sure to remain where you have been," said Acland, as he rode on. "It will eventually sober Robin."

"Probably, sir," observed Phillips, who had jumped everything he could find. Robin's already swelling knee bearing testimony to the hardness of one wall.

As they turned the corner to Scanlans Wood, a big square of trees, Acland's face brightened up; seeing Evie on her chestnut, her eyes alight with happiness.

"She had thought the first draw too far," she said, "so had met them there. The chestnut was perfection."

But even there, nodding to the crowd, she was conscious of the same breath of coldness; people

looked at her, whispered, and rode by talking earnestly. The men grave; the women speaking in low tones, shaking puzzled heads.

She walked, checking her horse, letting people pass, until she heard Neill's voice as he rode up. His face was troubled too; the woman he was with looked across at Evie, on her new horse; twisted her mouth a little, and rode on, as if ill pleased.

"Isn't he a dream?" Evie touched the chestnut with her heel, showing him off. "Isn't he a dream, Neill?"

"A nice horse and a valuable one," Neill levers said. "How did you get him, Evie? You've never told me"—this rather eagerly.

"But I did," she said, wide-eyed. "I told you—we exchanged."

"Oh, that"—he looked grave—"that was humbug, of course. I wish you'd tell me, Evie. I'd like to know; I want to."

"I have told you. I've just told you again. The boy had some buyer for the grey mare, and he took her and gave me this."

Neill said nothing more, but his face drooped as a man confronted by some hopeless barrier. The flaw of coldness seemed to slip into his manner. Only for a moment; love may grieve, but it cannot doubt.

"I do wish you'd tell me for my own satisfaction," he said again. "It would—would save so many things, Evie."

She flashed at him petulantly, ill pleased. "He seemed to have got this upon the brain." So they turned into the wood to meet O'Neill's nephew riding a rough, powerful bay, which plunged and shied at the crowd.

"New, he's to it," said the youth cheerfully. "His first day from the plough. I but bought him yestherday afther I soult the chestnut."

The words drifted plain and clear to Neill Ievers as he rode by. Drifted to others, who looked at their friends with understanding. If Evie had merely exchanged, where could O'Neill's nephew have got the money to buy this fine colt, unless . . .

He checked his horse. "Have you sold the grey mare?" Neill asked.

"An' she round her sthall on but two legs, and the third half off," said O'Neill's nephew contemptuously. He was quite forgetting his promise of secrecy. "The two fetlocks foremost strained on her, and she draggin' the hock afther her. I will be two months . . ." Here he caught sight of Acland, remembered his promises to be discreet, and blushed a painful poppy colour. "That is," he said, stumbling over his words, "I might have her soult any day, when she'd mind on me."

Neill Ievers rode on, unhappily. Why would not Evie tell him where she had got the money, so that he might refute these creeping tales which turned about her? Where could either Hartland gather fifty pounds to buy a horse with? His mother talked of it freely. Nita Cropthorne had left; but it was the country's titbit of scandal, and they chewed it; some distastefully, some with manifest disbelief, some with enjoyment. Who had taken the big diamond? Mr. Fielding had set police on the track, despite Miss Cropthorne's refusal to move; he said the diamond belonged to posterity, not to her. Neill looked away down the long wood, grass sides, branching and crossing, tangle

of moss and lush ferns among the bushes below ; of lacing boughs above. Scent of rotting heaped leaves ; so lately fallen. Autumn's melancholy tale of death still upon them, and all nebulous in the swirls of mist ; but the feeling of coldness grew, chill and bitter, and the girl, not understanding, felt it.

Acland was now full of determination ; as apparently you might not jump in amongst the pack when it stood beneath a wall ; it meant you must hurry greatly so as to be with them when they started. He was considering all this when hounds opened, someone tallied a fox ; the quiet wood was alive with the thunderous thud of iron-shod hoofs, the sound of voices, the rush of straining horses.

The horn tooted sharply from a distance. People divided, going in strings right, left, and straight on. One man cried he was for Mount Hilyard, another that it was for Southville. Acland chose the left, and it was wrong ; they turned, fleeting through the fog, to gallop at length into a big field and see no hounds. People loomed gigantic, hurrying in front. The fog thickened to a woolly whiteness, blurring the distance ; fences rose suddenly from nowhere.

Bad luck is as importunate as an over-fond woman—once there, she remains, putting her arms round your neck at unsuitable moments. She mounted behind Acland, and he found himself pounding with a hopeless throng ; climbing mountainous double walls, dropping from them bumpily, flying smaller places, splashing through fords, and never seeing a hound throughout it all. Country men directed and misdirected, until he joined a string who galloped for Durra gorse, and arrived at the square patch to see the scar of horses' hoofs, the ruin of stones, and hear

nounds had gone through and back to where they had started from.

Acland was with a string of strangers—soldiers from Tuiloun, who knew little of the country, and generally relied on hard riding to keep them near hounds. They swore now freely, furious, with a readiness and sympathy which established friendship. The road was the quickest way back, but they would have none of it; so they jumped, a flock of lost sheep, into the fields. Acland, carried on by Blackbird's rush, found himself first. His courage was waning; the field was barred by a particularly forbidding wall with a man perched upon it.

"They're back, runnin' like the divil himself!" the watcher called at them excitedly. "An' ye left here now? What was at ye at all?"

Acland, riding up, inquired as to the further side of the wall; it rose out of the white mist and the fog-swallowed certainty. The man, who came to Ballymacshane, knew him.

"What's beyant, is it? The sorra a ha'porth but the level field, and a fine safe fall to it. Arrah, if ye have the convaniansy, Misther Acland, let ye come at it."

The shame of being called by name tingled in the little man's ears through the chill swirl of the mist.

He had the "convaniansy." He loosed Blackbird, and they sprang into the white coldness of uncertainty to soar downwards over a seven-foot drop.

"Glory!" yelled the man, as Blackbird sailed in air. "Sit back. Success to ye all!" as the Tulloun soldiers took it in line, their horses flying it.

"Great God! a precipice," sobbed Acland in his fright, rocking and clutching.

"Sthick on," said the friendly voice, just as the

green field rose solidly. "Howld on, I tell ye. Glory, ye're over!"

That incident over, they groped on again, still lost and unhappy. Other shapes loomed out of the mist, one coming close to Blackbird and going gallantly at a high wall. Acland was not sure if he could doubt his own eyes, or if the long-tailed, large horse was his own Holy Robin, with Phillips upon his back.

"Phillips!" he cried, in amazement. "Phillips, what brings you HERE?" said his master.

"Cursed . . . that is very bad luck, sir." Phillips eased Robin, who was going like a lamb. "Missed hounds in the mist half a mile back. Most unfortunate, sir; close to them all day. Hope to catch them, sir."

The valet's tie was loose, one of Tom's gaiters depended on a single button; but there beamed upon his face an unvaletlike enjoyment, and he cantered at the next wall, and sat it with an ease which stung Acland with envy. Phillips did not wait. The chestnut's great stride ate up all the ground; he kept ahead, and was lost in the swirling dimness.

Acland was bereft of words. Whatever the man did, his master found no hounds. They gave in, and pulled to a walk, giving it up as hopeless. There were four soldiers, brothers in misfortune, and home seemed their one hope.

"Back to Durra."

The senior, Major Hill, a man now suffering from shortness of temper, suggested this shortly.

Standish had told him to meet him at Durra, so Acland rode with them, by devious twisting ways, to the village—a pretty place built on either side of a wide road; little thatched cottages, covered with creepers; slated houses of two imposing

storeys, tiny shops—prosperous-looking, with none of Ireland's squalidness or poverty.

Standish had just arrived; the hunt had ended where they found, the fog stopping them.

They went into the little hotel, Standish directing them.

"To the right," he said, and Acland turned into a small room occupied by two ladies in habits.

They were having tea at a square table. One, a pretty girl whom Acland had noticed out, raised her head. She poised the tea-pot in her hands, and stared at them.

"Have some tea?" she asked, rather awkwardly.

Acland thought it was friendly of a stranger, and accepted.

"Or something stronger?"

This was almost familiar. Hill, still depressed by his missed hunt, got to the bell.

"Oh, no—Tea," he said snappily, as the maid answered. "And eggs, lightly boiled and poached, for five."

Acland had got his tea; there was no more. At Oonagh all tea-pots were shared, so the others waited and grumbled. Food was short; one subaltern took out his uneaten sandwiches, making bitter comments on the Durra Arms. They fell upon the eggs, too ill-humoured to appreciate the strangely thoughtful kindness of the small lady, who rang and ordered toast, and handed butter, apologising for shortcomings sweetly.

"Exceedingly niggardly," said Acland, as he emptied the toast-dish and then ate eggs.

Standish pushed the door open, blocking it with his lean length of limb.

"Hullo, Mrs. Rupert! so you've got this room this year. What a tea-party you've had here."

Mrs. Rupert observed with twinkling eyes that it was rather a discontented one, and not quite pleased with her, and the flood-tides of horror poured crimson to Acland's ears. They had ordered and grumbled in a lady's private room, even taking her own tea-pot from her hands.

Major Hill lost his presence of mind and endeavoured to sup his tea with his egg-spoon, pausing transfixed with a spoonful half-way. The unhappy youth who had produced his sandwiches put the remnants in the toast-dish, and covered them, with what purpose he could scarcely have explained; one bolted horror-stricken. A silence thick and chill as the fog outside fell upon them.

"A very dissatisfied party, taking no notice of their hostess," said the lady demurely.

Here, observing their confusion and its various results, she laughed long and unrestrainedly, and their own merriment presently shook the room. She pressed more tea upon them, hospitably, and advised eggs, boiled lightly, as an accompaniment. Acland alone failed to be comforted; the mild decorum of his life had never been so outraged. Standish called them a nice set of wolves with undisturbed gloom, and took his own tea pleasantly.

"I have never," said the little Englishman, having got outside, as he raised a stiff joint towards the step, "been so exceedingly uncomfortable in my life."

"Well, now," said Standish, "allow the roan cob to proceed at a gallop. Didn't you go into the room all strangers and come out friends?"

On consideration Acland was obliged to say that they had.

"And what more could you want?" said the Irishman equably, blind to the horror of the occurrence. "Sit tight, Sandy; there's a motor coming over the hill."

There was. The night had cleared, the fog had slipped away; they drove through a still darkness, broken now by the sudden glare of the great acetylene as they rushed upon them. The roan pony quivered with horror, beating the air with his fore legs. Standish and Acland caught his head and got him to earth, and by holding and threatening got the shivering brute past the car. It had been pulled up, but the buzzing and the lights goaded the genuinely terrified roan to madness. He shivered and sweated, and had to be walked for half a mile, plunging at every noise; then they got up again, and the drive proceeded quietly; but Standish said it would go badly with them if they met another.

The night was still and calm, a blue sky floating peacefully, lit by faint lamps of stars. Standish remarked that they had no need of lights, for it would be clear as day when the moon rose.

That happened speedily.

They drove up a long slope, the road beyond them cut through high banks, disappearing as it looped the hill. As Standish spoke the full moon rose above this point, clear and round a great globe of light serenely shining just above the road. The roan saw its gleam above him, gave a sob of exquisite terror, and chaos descended.

When Standish and Sandy arrived very late for dinner in Biddy O'Mahony's jennet-cart, the subdued roan led behind, they told the story with some sadness and a good deal of force.

Miss Susie, revolving about them like a human fly-wheel, and pitying their muddy condition, could not see what the moon had to do with it.

"Oh, nothing," said Standish drily, plastering a cut finger. "But, you see, directly the roan saw it rise over the hill, he took it for another motor, and lepped the wall off the road. It was a six-foot drop, and the shafts broke . . . besides, 'twas boggy and stony."

Standish then stood upon the door-step declaring that it was all fright, and he'd half a mind to buy a motor and train the cob.

The pony was perhaps worth forty pounds.

Acland, very battered and dirty, climbed to his room and the ministrations of Phillips, musing with distraught mind upon the ways of Ireland and her **SONS.**

"The only good part of it is," Standish's melancholy voice rang out from the hall, "that Sandy's coat is clean split down the back. He must buy another."

Acland snorted with hopeless asperity, and forgot to scold Phillips or inquire for Robin.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW THE LAW WAS DEFIED

" . . . the dreams were scattered
As chaff is tossed by the wind—
The faith has been rudely shattered
That listened with credence blind.

"Ah, me ! we believe in evil,
Where once we believed in good,
The world, the flesh, and the devil
Are easily understood."

—GORDON.

ACLAND put down the *Irish Times* with a jerk.

"The whole thing," he said, in his precise way, "is so absolutely absurd, except for an undue desire for hounds and horses, I cannot see myself, nor can any sensible man, of the lawlessness of Ireland. They appear to me to be a most well-conducted race."

Standish suggested that a letter to the *Times* might be written about it on Sandy's return. It would be all convincing, and immediately bring about Home Rule—but there was a suspicious dryness in his accent.

Horses pawed at the door. Sandy was about to trust himself upon that tall animal, Holy Robin, and ride with Standish to see a young horse in the wild country beyond the hills. Mr. Phillips, bubbling with polite advice, which he dared not give, hovered upon

the doorstep as his master mounted, and they paced out in the softness of a grey December morning—moan of rain in the gentle wind, drive of light clouds across a pallid sky.

“If you lived where we are going to to-day, you might not talk so much about law,” said Standish thoughtfully. “Jog along, Sandy ; we’ve twelve miles to go.”

Twelve elastic Irish miles, stretching interminably, taking them deeper and deeper into a wild, sparsely populated land. Here and there tiny cabins crouching squalidly ; people who stared without greeting as they passed, now and again a ruin, grey stones and rotting thatch piled by the roadside, touched now with Time’s softening wand.

“The Devlyn estate,” Standish said. “They battered those houses down with the ram, and flung the people out to starve ; they peopled the place with police and emergency men, and brought all the majesty of the law to bend these peasants, yet twenty years after, look at it. Fences down ; rough, half-grazed grass ; no sign of life or alleviation. Twenty years hence no man will take it unless the old owners go back,” said Standish. “Small pieces are used up ; the bulk is as you see. A strange people and obstinate—these law-abiding Irish. Hearts have broken here, and men turned to mere animals. Seen their children want—thirsting for blood down here as they starved ; there’ve been shots fired and lives taken from behind these hedges we’re passing. Devlyn is a hard man, and the countryside has never got over it. They’re sullen and ready to rise at any minute, full now of this new Land Act, but Devlyn won’t sell. Here we are—and something’s up too,” he added.

Men were drifting past them ; coming in knots of twos and threes with sticks and pitchforks in their hands, and converging across the fields in one direction. They turned into a substantial-looking farm-house, skirted the inevitable manure heap, and were greeted by the horse's owner, who immediately proffered tea and eggs and whisky after their ride. The colt was a fine one. Standish plunged almost happily into the mazes of the deal, wrangling and disparaging, and occasionally getting up to jog the horse across a field, after which exercise he returned fresh to the contest, as an Atlas who had touched earth.

Sandy was slightly bored ; he wandered several times round the manure heap ; decided the brown was very like all other horses, and then went on to the road, following Standish, who had varied his jog by going that way. Here they encountered a fat man, on a wheezy chestnut cob, who pulled up and gave greeting.

Standish looked at him with interest. "Business, Magee ?" he queried.

"Mrs. Sheenane, sir, won't pay these two years, because she says she'll buy or nothin'. I'm warned there'll be trouble. An unfortunate case, entirely, Misther Standish, for she's there, an' her people before her for generations. But I must do me duty."

Sandy was violently interested. He queried excitedly, gathering that Magee was the bailiff about to serve writs of eviction on one or two small farmers, and on a Mrs. Bridget Sheenane. This was a new sight. Sandy, wishing to add it to his notes, asked if he might not go to see. Standish said there was no reason against it, so the now placid Robin being produced, Sandy mounted and rode. The way lay at first through boycotted farms, stretching

drearily on either side, the fences flat, the coarse, uncropped grass, waving in the breeze. Then they turned down a narrow road, twisting through a bog, and saw on a rise of ground the cottage of Mrs. Sheenane—a thatched building with long piles of turf and snug ricks of hay at the back.

“A warm woman who could pay three times over,” said Magee crossly. “But she won’t. I knew it. Look there,” he muttered.

Mrs. Sheenane’s house was not unguarded; a crowd gathered like black crows on the rise behind it, moving uneasily—all with something in their hands. As the riders appeared, they were hailed with a sudden blare of discordant horns and beat of drums which sent Robin on to his hind legs. Then their silence broke into a deep murmuring.

Mrs. Sheenane herself waving a tin can appeared in her doorway. Magee drew rein.

“Come on and serve ye’re writ, ye vilyans,” she shrilled, high above the ominous murmur. “Come on; let ye—”

The face of His Majesty’s bailiff blanched from its habitual purple, until it looked like a stale, broad bean.

“The law,” he said, going forward, eyeing Mrs. Sheenane and the road behind him impartially. “I must carry it out, Mrs. Sheenane.”

“Fine ye’re law looks!” yelled his opponent. “Here let ye keep him, all of ye.”

The drums beat, and the horns blared, the crowd spread, stealthily moving in a grim half-moon of lowering faces and clutched weapons.

“By the Mother of God, if I goes up, I think they mane mischief,” burst out Magee, in an awed whisper, beads of perspiration trickling down his face, while

Mrs. Sheenane, dancing, bade him come on with his writs.

"They mane — murther! Come on, sir!" cried Magee, and wheeling, fled, not a moment too soon.

The crowd yelled. Behind them, on the hill, the clatter broke out, drumming and tooting. Robin with a plunge which almost threw his rider, turned also, and Sandy found himself involved in frantic flight. The crowd of men came on, shouting, waving pitchforks and sticks, leaping the bog ditches, closing in on the bailiff and his companion.

It seemed an easy task to distance the running men, but it was not. The road wound tortuously; the pursuers skimmed across country, and were almost upon them at the first turn, one, in fact, being near enough to fling a stick at Robin's legs. The big horse could easily have forged ahead, but Sandy would not leave the bleating bailiff, even if he had known the road. Magee talked incessantly as he rode, wailing out details concerning death at a pitchfork's end, and subsequent burying in bog-holes, which made Sandy's blood run cold.

He on his part advised reason, yet fled unchecked. A man in a nightmare. It was 1906 in a well-ruled country, yet they fled for their lives before a screaming mob, and death clattered at their heels.

"Clancy's Cross," cried the bailiff; "they'll cut us off there. We with a mile to go, and they with but a quarter."

He pointed to the crowd now racing in one direction.

Sandy saw it. Behind them was the bog, before them the narrow road coming out where these demons would meet them.

"We must jump," he said.

Fear clutching him, he turned Holy Robin at the fence off the road. Robin asked for nothing better. He soared over the bank, his rider's knees flying wide, and strode up the field, pursued by Magee, whose cob was no mean performer. The jump was greeted by an enraged roar from the running men.

Robin fenced brilliantly and impetuously; Sandy held his breath at each obstacle. If the chestnut were to fall and get away, what would happen to a most innocent spectator? Would protest avail before that whooping advance? Reason said "Yes," and Ireland said "No."

The land lay low. They were splashed with mud and torn by brambles as they reached Clancy's Cross, and finally distanced their pursuers.¹

To Standish, who had just bought the horse, and was going into the best parlour for hot bread, vile whisky, tea and boiled eggs, there arrived a mud-bespattered, gasping man, glancing over his shoulder for the many-weaponed death he had left behind him.

Close to him galloped Magee, yelling murder as he came, breathing out the terror of his tale to Standish, and galloping on as fast as the yellow cob would go, knowing no peace until he reached the police barracks a mile farther. Sandy fell, rather than got off Robin, landing on the manure heap, and followed Standish into the house.

"Black murder," he declaimed—"murder. Standish, they meant to kill us."

"I wouldn't be surprised if they did. They might have done it too, with their blood up. Not much of you two foxes if the hounds had come up," said

¹ True, from report in *Irish Times*, 28th April, 1906.

Standish, equably drinking tea. It was etiquette to leave them along to eat. "Will you write to the *Times* about our law-abiding now, Sandy?"

"I will not," replied the Londoner, shuddering.

"And yet, 'twas half sport to them," said Standish mildly; "as much for hunting as anything, with you and Maguire, the foxes. It will be a good thing if they don't recognise you on the way home."

Sandy thought this unkind.

Next day marked the event of one of the runs of the season, and several other more important things. They met at four cross-roads, and went to draw a patch of low-lying gorse, couching in a wild stretch of boggy land; a dark, dreary little place, sheltered by hills. But it held: there was a chorus in covert, crackling of and parting of gorse as hounds leapt through, rising and falling, little ships in a prickly, deep-hued sea. He broke slap through the waiting field, away by a clump of cottages. Hounds poured out, flashed wide, and were away, mute on a breast-high scent. Bristles up, heads down, every nerve thirsting for blood. A wave of straining bodies and eager, wistful faces, they fled across the field on the trail, swift as misfortune, true as sorrow. It was a fair start across an open country; but the cottages spelt disaster to more than half the field. Gates were locked, timber too high to jump; Sandy, thanks to Blackbird declining to take the apparent short cut, got a start. The run from Achgarra had been a hunt, but this was a sportsman's dream of perfection.

Straight away across low-lying fields, hounds driving ahead, running at a speed which took a fast horse to live with them. No fear of jumping on them now, but sit down and ride hard for a glimpse of their vanishing sterns. High, green banks looming and

left behind ; perfect fences with no hint of wire or hedge. The rush of air in heated faces ; the ripple of strong muscles, shoulders cutting the air in front as the good horse strides along. Prop and steady at a narrow bank ; swing at a wide ditch ; fly over a stone wall. The London blood was afire with it all ; the perfect joy without the fear of loss or parting which mars our stronger happiness. This comes and is perfection, and dies to be born again, freshly perfect, a thing to live for, to be glad one has known. The good black mare strode on, lathered a little, but going free and strong, shooting far over the high banks, yet careful of her little unskilled rider, whose face was alight as he went.

The first fields lay low, and were silver-sheeted by water. They swished through it, not without disaster, for a ditch overflowed its banks, and horses galloped in, and splashing mightily, dark riders arising in Venus like from the tide.

Ahead were Gervase, O'Neill's nephew—his new purchase going well, and Standish on a thorough-bred, a young one, but jumping perfectly, striding on while other horses sobbed. At one fence a horse came down, missed its kick, and staggering, fell to rise no more, its back broken. Looking back, one could see the dark blot lying still, and the pink-coated owner standing beside, touching the dead head softly. No bitterer parting than that of a man and his horse—true friend and gallant beast.

They ran up hill on to lighter land, a relief to blown horses, but the pace was unchecked. Still hounds raced ahead, mute and unhesitating. Behind them, wide-scattered, came the tail which had lost its start, a tail of a mile or more, for there was no time to look or pick places.

"He's gone there," Gervase spoke to Standish, pointing to a ruined castle on a hillside.

They galloped down a long field, coming to a wide Government drain, impossible to clear, but negotiable by jumping against the far bank and climbing up. Now one of the most disconcerting things in the world is to jump against a slope; all support of horse appears to vanish suddenly as one lands.

Acland knew nothing of this; he came at it loose reined and undaunted, with an idea that no drain was disturbing. Blackbird poised; she shot out with all the strength of her great quarters, landing high on the steep slope. Sandy Acland took the shock with an astounded "Oh!" the mare's hind-quarter seemed to vanish, his legs flew wide, and he came handsomely back clean over her right side. Blackbird went on, she considered she was only required to wait in the next field. Acland struck the bank, turned over, clutched at nothing, turned over again, not overfast, but gathering momentum, seeing in every roll the muddy waters below him growing nearer and nearer.

He had seen them five times, to a cheery chorus from the lookers-on, of well turned, well rolled, when they rose to meet him, and he emerged, dripping, to see some twenty people staring on the bank and laughing unrestrained. The fox was to ground in the next field. As he proceeded up the bank on all fours, he observed Evie Hartland on the chestnut among them. He wrung his coat out with some ill-humour; it was new, and had been very expensive.

But the memory of those four unchecked miles was death to bad temper. Wet and ridiculous, Sandy's heart glowed, and he petted Blackbird. Let them

laugh if they like ; they had not seen hounds as they raced over those green fields.

Alexander Acland, despite his ignorance, knew himself to be a sportsman. He wiped some mud from his hair, and felt there was nothing like hunting ; no country like Ireland, no people like these laughter-loving race which rode near him and called him teetotum.

The chestnut horse had carried Evie excellently, in a stern chase, far behind hounds ; but other things than the lack of start troubled the girl as she came up. That same strange breath of coldness, chilling from unsuspected places ; curious looks, whispers as she passed by, and Neill—Neill not anxious to keep near her ; not turning his head with a whispered "Come along !" but sweeping on, and leaving her in the crowd about the cottages, apparently without a thought ; showing a gloomy, unhappy profile now as she arrived, pausing to offer a sandwich with a sudden wistfulness which she failed to understand. The girl's head sank, her throat hurt her, not knowing what happened. A woman in love delights in self-torture ; she made up her story quickly : Neill was going to marry someone, Miss Cropthorne, probably, and was afraid to break it to her. So, smarting with misery, she was irresponsive to his gentle words, shook her head at his proffered sandwich, and rode away with her head up, when her heart yearned for him and grieved at his hurt face. A woman's way, since Eve stole apples and was meanly blamed by her spouse. I'm sure they sulked afterwards outside the gates of Eden.

No man must expect two very good hunts in one day. How often, after a splendid morning gallop, one stays out, riding uselessly from covert to covert, and

then going home, ungratefully dubs the day "poor ; a nice little spin early," thus branding a hunt, which, ridden in the evening, would have sent us home glowing and chattering, vowing hounds had never run so hard or so straight. Horses are fresher in the morning ; one enjoys it more at the time, but the afternoon runs are those handed down to posterity. Just as to mankind the last piece of sorrow or happiness overshadows its once superior companions. Humanity lives in the present and futurity ; poor memory can do but little against its rude rivals of flesh and phantasy.

So the day of this great hunt ended disappointingly ; the next covert, a patch of gorse on a hillside, was blank Barryveen held, and they galloped round and round the big domain until the horses were tired and men swore. They wasted the day there in long circles, and little bursts away beyond the walls, until, as O'Neill's nephew remarked : " They cot wan lad an' ate him," and then it was too late to do any more. Dark was cringing below the trees, white mist-wraiths rose swirling in the hollows ; purple lights peered over the rim of the hills, mourning the dying day.

The hounds worried fox-bones with gory jaws, and were happy ; from their point of view it had been a most satisfactory chase ; far more so than the hunt in the morning, ending in hungry disappointment.

Barryveen was a long, red house ; a rambling, comfortable place, with unlimited supplies of tea, toast, and eggs ready for hunters.

Evie Hartland, now very tired, put the chestnut in the stable, and came round. She did not notice that she had not been asked in : Lady Barry was a friend of hers, always glad to see her. She came alone

through the big, square hall, hung with heads of shot beasts from many lands ; and great, rugged elks' horns unearthed from the bogs ; a wood fire was reflected cheerily in the oaken floor. Hungry men filled the dining-room, clattering and chattering ; able to attack rounds of beef and fat white turkeys and pink hams at half-past four in the afternoon. Evie went on to the gentler trinkle of tea-cups ; babble of shrilly voices coming from the drawing-room. She pushed the door open, going in unannounced. A dozen people were gathered round the fire drinking tea : they did not hear her. Mrs. Ievers was standing by the tea-table speaking to Lady Barry, a tall, imposing woman with a weak, pleasant face.

"It really seems the only solution—otherwise, why did she fly off the next day ? Where did the money come from to buy—?"

"Miss Hartland ! Oh, how do ye do ?" said her ladyship quietly.

Evie heard the words without understanding, but she saw her hostess's face, saw the hand upheld for silence, felt the sudden hush. One must be courteous in one's own house—yet plainly courtesy and nothing more prompted the gentle greeting. Mrs. Ievers, leaving the tea-table, passed by with a coldly given bow.

"Tea, Miss Hartland ?" said Lady Barry—then in suddenly sympathetic tones : "How tired you look."

Evie took her tea, sitting aloof away from the cheering fire and chattering women. From one, in half tones, she heard Miss Crophorne's name. "Where did she get the money ?" As fog rolls up at the sun's touch, her brain cleared, and she knew—the horror of it numbing her hands, making her sit with beating, terrified heart and blanched cheeks.

They suspected *her* of having stolen the diamond; of having slipped out the stone, pawned or sold it, and bought O'Neill's horse with the money. They—Neill's mother thought this vile thing of her; Neill himself. She remembered now that he had asked her to tell him how she had paid for the horse. He had pleaded, and she had given the only answer she knew of, which she still believed to be the truth. Neill suspected her also. The walls of the long drawing-room closed in upon her, the old-fashioned carpet was a sea beneath her feet—yet she sat still and gave no sign—she would not faint and have a horde of human vultures cluster above her dead reputation. Bitterness is not measured by hours; in those brief minutes the cruel flood drowned the girl's soul, leaving its jetsam of a dead hope and a marred youth, as it abated a little, and she could think—

They were all talking, she thought—all looking covertly at her—the thief.

"I don't believe it, and I won't— Oh!"

The men paused at the door; they too were talking of her.

"More tea, Miss Evie?" Lord Barry's voice, close to her, now speaking to her. "More tea? Why, you've not taken this"—she gulped it down, cold, bitter stuff—the frank kindness bringing sudden tears.

They were discussing her everywhere apparently. Lady Barry, sorry for the girl, rose then and sat beside her; she was her husband's echo—an ever appreciative reflection of his opinions, and seeing him kind to Evie immediately thought the whole thing a fabrication.

Evie rose quietly, making some excuse about her waiting horse and went out. She knew the

sudden buzz of voices behind spoke of her. She was almost appalled by the tragedy which had burst upon her—appalled and angry with the impotence which is the hardest anger to bear. A tearing demon rending its creator with poisoned claws.

They suspected her of being a thief; not a great sinner, for even in sin greatness has its own value, but a mere petty pilferer. A girl who would stoop to the meanness of slipping away those lost diamonds and selling them, that she might buy a horse.

Nora had gone home; she was alone in the dusk; dimness mouthing at her, the trees lacing softly; a fretted arch of bare boughs spanning the red gleam in the sky.

It was cold and dreary; the chestnut went lame, brushing on a hind leg; great tears gathered and ran down Evie's cheeks; sobs rent her, and through it all that bitterness of anger dried the tears ere they were shed.

That they dared—dared—

A horse clattered behind her—she turned to see O'Neill's nephew jogging rapidly, and blessed the gloom which hid her tear-stained cheeks.

"Didn't he carry you well, miss; wasn't it a fair trate to see him leppin'?"

The boy was justly proud of his power of training.

"And the grey?" asked Evie suddenly. "You have not sold her—or have you?"

"Sold her?" But O'Neill's nephew remembered his promises and past blunders; he did not mean to err again. "Well, not yit," he remarked, lying fluently. "But haven't I the buyer for her, as I told ye. He's only waitin' on the bit ov a tinker she has to pass over. Sure, how could I let ye have the chestnut if I hadn't one to take the mare?"

It seemed indisputable. It was as she thought. Yet they doubted, had not believed her, cried Evie's sore, angry heart. If some man was a fool and wished to pay so much for her, a useless grey mare, was she—Evie—to blame?

"Who wants her?" she asked, anxious for this evidence.

O'Neill's nephew blushed and gained time by calling his horse a "wicked sthumbler." Then, having severely punished the animal for an unmade mistake, he was ready.

"A friend of me own, miss. One Misther Harty from Dublin," he said, with dignity, and then observing that he must be shortenin' the road an' get on, he hastened away.

A little further she overtook Sandy, who was riding homewards with Tom. A slight cold made him careful; he had declined to sit in a hot room and then come out into the cool evening air. The girl called to him, so that he turned and waited for her. He was balm to her wounded spirits, for she felt that he did not think or know this thing: he was too transparent to have hidden it. She welcomed him as she always did, looking on him as friend beyond the compass of sex. As an old man—everything beyond forty is old to twenty—who admired her in a friendly way. So she smiled at him with a half-pitiful gaiety: a gleam in her pretty eyes which would have deceived a wiser man.

"Tired?" he asked, seeing her wan face below the hard hat-brim.

"Tired? Yes, very, Sandy. Tired of life . . . of . . . everything."

"Oh, Miss Evie!" He was shocked by the tragic bitterness of her tone.

The shadows rose from the gloomy hedges and crept out across the world; the evening darkened fast; confidence was in the air. Birds twittered sleepily, fluttering on their perches; the lost sun still stained the gloomy sky.

"Why," he bent closer to her. "Look here! we made a compact once, you and I, that I was to help you if could, or if you wanted it. Won't you let me? Once, long ago, Miss Evie, when I was young and thoughtless . . . there was someone then I might have helped and saved; but blind, I stood aside, and never saw death creeping up. For the sake of the woman I lost then, I see more clearly; my eyes brightened by undying remorse."

She knew that he spoke of Kathleen, and listened with bent head.

"So let me help you now. Won't you? If it's money, anything that I can do."

The girl thought his face the kindest she had ever seen, as it bent to her in the twilight. Plain, perhaps, but with so much feeling in the blue eyes; in the firm, sensitive mouth; that girl as she was, too young to analyse, she saw it.

"Oh, Sandy! you are good, but you . . . cannot," she said. A lump rose in her throat, hurting her. She could not tell him, it seemed so shameful. "You cannot help me. It is not money."

"Has anyone, then, vexed you? Neill? Sir Edmund?"

"Neill." All her hurt pride and anger burst out against the man, as a woman's will against the man she loved. Although at a touch from his hand, a kind word from his lips, it would have melted, mere futile hoar-frost before the sun's rays, she felt now that she hated him because he had dared to think

this thing of her—had at least, if he had not actually thought it, asked her questions, doubted her. "Neill. He has no power to vex me, Sandy," she said, with an elaborate contempt which would have betrayed her to a wiser man. "I—I—oh, I detest him."

Foolish Sandy, believing her; not versed enough in the ways of women to know what this meant.

"Certainly not Neill, and as for Edmund Graves, he worries me by his quiet insistence, dumb, and therefore harder to combat, that one day I shall marry him. He comes over to Castleknock; monopolises me whenever he can; drives us out in the motor, which is very hard to resist, and dangles his riches everlastingly before me."

"His riches!" Sandy sniffed. "My dear child, he is not rich."

"Not rich?" She stared wide-eyed at him. "He is opulent. Two thousand a year, and a big place. Is not that riches?"

"We should not call it so in London," he said drily, almost tempted to tell her of her own unspent income—two thousand a year is nothing.

"So you see, Sandy, there is nothing you can do for me"—her voice was drooping sadly—"though it is very good of you to ask me." The rattle of wheels and sound of quick trotting echoed behind them. "Here is Standish," she said. "Now you go, and I ride home alone; I branch off here."

Standish's arrival reminded her of the warm room she had left, the bitter agony of her discovery; and the pain swept over her again in overwhelming flood. It was too hard, too cruel, that anyone should dare to believe this of her.

"There is only one way you could help me,

Sandy," she said, with trembling lips and childish, breaking voice, "and that—I don't want to tell you of—"

Standish, reining up the roan cob, interrupted, calling Sandy to hurry.

"I—might be able to, Miss Evie."

The failing light veiled the flood of crimson which rose to his cheeks. He thought that he understood. She liked him, wanted him to rescue her by marrying her, and thus be secure from worries. If she detested Neill and was afraid of Graves, it must be that.

"I might be able to," he half-whispered, his own voice shaking now.

And though the vision of her beauty made his senses spin, though the glimpse of her drooping face and dark eyes through the dusk was a sweet one, it was not with unmixed bliss that he struggled into his warm coat, with the roan dancing an equine step executed entirely on hind legs, and Standish remonstrating sadly concerning tardiness.

"Get in, man," he urged. "The pony's off his head with cold."

It was too clear that the roan was prepared to fly at any unforeseen motor or moon; in fact, a bicycle lamp might have upset him.

They called out good-night to the girl, who was turning to the right down a narrow road; her horse hobbling painfully.

"Good-night!" The voice that came from the shadows echoed with a half-checked sob.

"She . . . Miss Evie is not in good spirits." Sandy spoke thoughtfully, burrowing chilled fingers into lined gloves.

"No, but in the devil's own bad ones," said Standish grimly, for he knew the reason.

CHAPTER XVII

TELLING OF A HUNT AND A MISTAKE

“With mistletoe round me, and holly,
Scarlet and green at Yule.”

—GORDON.

CHRISTMAS at Ballymacshane was no mere episode of an extra prayer-meeting or reminder of amounts due. It was heralded by the reduction of the plough horses to extreme emaciation as they toiled to and fro to the station; by ever-increasing collections of brown paper parcels containing presents, and by the murder of countless turkeys which hung gibbeted in the hay barn. Sandy found himself carried away by the current; against his will he shuggled in the thronged shops and bought lace collarettes and muslin ties for the maids—his purchases directed by Aunt Catty—and sundry other things, all exceedingly useless, for Phillips and Tom. He knew then that presents must be purchased for the two old ladies; but here economy triumphed; he wrote to London, buying them each a brooch, one a cat and one a hen, which convulsed them with delight. The present mania was contagious; at one counter they happened on Phillips, plunged in deep thought over several gaudy scarves and silken handkerchiefs. He blushed when he saw them.

There was no escaping festivity or hoping for quiet.

There was a long hour's work distributing a one-time cow in small, gory parcels of beef to pleased workmen's wives, from the sirloin for the steward, down to the hock for old Larry O'Brien—these accompanied by bundles of tea and sugar—hailed with blessings, which, if fulfilled, would have impoverished Heaven.

There was a chilly expedition on Christmas morning, undertaken alone by Acland, to the damp church in the village, now broken out in an eruption of slightly soiled cotton wool, with darker moss letters sprawling over it in various peaces and joys; the service rendered more varied by the fact that the parson's daughter, despite warners, had wooled and texted the stove-pipe, and on a sudden smouldering during the epistle, the parson flew to the rescue, combating danger with a coal-scoop, amid admiring plaudits from his congregation of ten.

There was the giving of the presents: Acland, who was a neat man, finding himself the possessor of a crimson-spotted tie and very bright yellow dogskin gloves, with strict injunctions to wear both at church, which he did (and felt pleased when the stove engrossed attention), and there was a mighty dinner, to which the Hartlands were bidden.

They drove over early, Nora gay and merry, in the teeth of several pressing debts, but Evie quiet and depressed, her eyelids suspiciously red. Christmas brought no joy to Evie Hartland. She was holding sorrow hard to her; riding aloof out hunting, speaking to no one except Sandy—refusing to see Neill when, sorry for her white face, he called. It was a fortnight now since she had learnt why people stared at her.

Sandy was dazzled—carried away by her prettiness and desire for his company. He was rich; there was

no reason why he should not take a nice house in town, come over for the winter's hunting, and give his wife a happy life. With unwonted generosity he had a present for each — neat hunting-crops initialled no difference between them save that Nora's bore the two letters N. H., and Evie's solely E. Forethought on the part of a business man. Yet at dinner and after, it was Nora he talked to, Nora to whom he told all his rules of hunting; his regret as to the cost; the horror of that weekly bill for the keep of the race-horse Crimson Rambler, now losing over hurdles.

"Miss Evie looks sad." He watched the girl's pure young profile, the glint of her hair in the lamplight, the pathetic droop of her pretty mouth.

"Something has gone wrong, and she won't tell me," Nora said sadly. "Edmund is always over now; perhaps she thinks she must marry him because he's rich."

"Rich!" snorted the man who grumbled at the half-crown capping, yet breathed contempt on a couple of thousand a year.

Evie looked up; her lips smiled seeing them watch her, but her eyes shone with the wet glimmer of tears.

"I do all I can," said Nora in low tones; "and the world's not worth living in if one can't make people we love happy. If any man or woman, Sandy, has the power to make another life happier, they ought to do it, and I think it will be counted up to them at the last."

"They ought," said Sandy, very quietly, his mind made up.

If the girl was showing him she wanted rescue from an unwanted admirer, and from life here, it was not for him to stand back.

St. Stephen's Day was a holiday of many diversions. There were to be races at Tulloun, but Standish, who hated racing, persuaded the master to have a surreptitious bye-day on the hills, and rattle the foxes until they left the thick covert.

So they met at the road below Knockane Hill, its crest lowering above them. Six in all, for the meet had been kept a secret, and they rode along chuckling at the thought of a possible run across the valley.

But—it was St. Stephen's Day. Now there abode round the village of Durra and Ballymacshane a collection of harriers, or animals called harriers. Blear-eyed, crooked-legged, rough-coated little brutes, collected at times, and taken out to pursue hares, which they did nobly. They were not fast or beautiful, but their noses were undisputable.

Hounds were scarcely in covert when a fox went away, taking the lower side of the hill, dodging from clump of gorse to shelter of rocks, and very pleased to find that scent on the bare, stony ground was faint; but as they galloped round a spur of the hills, they came suddenly upon a complete muster of the Durra and Ballymacshane foot harriers, engaged in looking for hares, with a crowd of excited followers and a master; the latter's status made apparent by a tin horn which emitted a rusty screech as he blew it.

Gervase pulled up perplexed, quite unprepared; he did not want to spoil these men's holiday, and he certainly did not want the sudden wave of harriers which dashed to join his own hounds, and commenced to help them to puzzle out the line. He was, in fact, about to turn back when the harrier master spoke diffidently. He was a tall young fellow, with immense

boots, and several old stockings wound with string, doing duty for gaiters.

Patrick O'Halleran ranged by his fellow-master, and proffered his suggestion if the Major would allow their dogs to hunt on with his own, it would be an honour ever remembered by Duna and Ballymacshane—they were off on it now, and 'twould be the quare fox that would lave them.

As he spoke, a Ballymacshane harrier threw up his head with a long-drawn yowl; the others flocked to him, and fifty couple of hounds poured on across the slanting ground with a variety of musical notes.

Refusal would only have given pain, as Gervase remarked ruefully to Standish; it was as good to make the best of it, and with a wild cheer from the men on foot, they dashed on. The foxhounds surged ahead eager and fast, behind them in a noisy plodding trail ran the harriers, every nose on the line, every tongue yowling freely—over hedges and rocks poured the men on foot; shouting happily, taking short cuts, panting noisily, and enjoying themselves as they had never hoped to.

The fox turned and twisted, trusting to his wits and a bad scent. He had succeeded by these tactics so often that he loped on carelessly, sure of escape.

But yowl, yowl came the music on his trail: they ran into the valley, when Patrick O'Halleran, seeing his pack left far behind, tried to get them to him with his horn. He had seen the fox go up the hill again, and was rewarded by just disobedience. The harriers came out to hunt, not to be lifted; they toiled on diligently, hunting every yard of it, made their slow circle, and came yapping and yowling upon the checked foxhounds who had over run

in on a road and were spread out baffled by the cold scent.

You ow ow.

"Hark to Sphinster," said O'Halleran. "She has it. Sphinster, plainly the mother of several families—spoke again—the hard, dry road did not baffle her.

"And Dhrummer. Yoi dhrummer boy. Yup—ow," said Drummer leisurely and undisturbed—he turned under this wall—flash came the highly bred foxhounds to the note and away again, leaving Sphinster toiling in their rear. Scrambling, tearing, shouting, the men appeared, scratched and blown, dashing through hedges, rolling over banks, falling against rocks. Now Mickey Murphy saw him, and rent the air with his yells; getting most of the foxhounds off the line. Now Davy Walsh got a view and hallooed wildly—the hill fox was getting very tired; this yowl, yowl, was more than he had bargained for.

Patient and untiring, the harriers crawled on, never lifting their heads as their swifter companions dashed by them, turning when the fox had turned, had they not hunted hares, unpuzzled by cold rocks and hard roads until the end came. The fox jumped up, dead-beat, out of a clump of thorn, and fifty couple of hounds poured in upon him with a merciful swiftness.

I fear the harriers came off second-best in the struggle for food, but the more cunning got their little share, and chewed it pleasantly to the accompanying plaudits of their many owners.

"Not a dog of them all like Sphinster, and he so old, haven't he a colley pup, sir, year ago, that's tending Walsh's sheep now. Spotty—still young—he's the

dog—look at him in at the fox as cool as he'd sthale mate. Did ye see Dhrummer now, when the county dogs were fair puzzled; hasn't he the nose on him; and no mistake? He'd thrack the devil himself, Dhrummer would, an' an old Danny, that never hurries," and so on, until the hounds gathered together, and, a little jaded by their long hunt, sat down upon the hillside, lean, wistful, fox-hound faces, and pointed harriers' noses, side by side in undisturbed amity.

Sandy thought it an excellent arrangement: he suggested that it should be made public, to show the good feeling in the country. Gervase observed him with a doubtful glance, giving Standish urgent instructions as to the latter's suppression if it was written.

The Master of the Harriers drew near, the foxes' brush stuck into his hat-band, a pleased grin on his face.

"'Twas the fine hunt, entirely," he observed. "And now, yer honour, if ye be quite finished, I think we'll divide the dogs."

Gervase looked at the pack, and wrestled with a sudden agony of laughter.

"Let ye go," commanded Patrick O'Halloran, palpably a born organiser, "with all the dogs to the wrong side in the thorn hedge, and when ye're there, hidden, for they'll have a wish now for the horses . . . I'll bugle and me own dogs'll come to me."

Gervase said nothing: meekly he directed his whips, meekly he rode through a gap in the hedge, fifty couple of hounds, and animals called hounds, pattering about him.

The horn blew with a rusty, tinny twang, again and again, until all the Sphinsters, Beautys, Spots, and

Drummers trailed off to its note, and the rival hunts looked at each other across a low bush of thorns.

"An' pleased we'd be to help ye to kill a fox any day," beamed O'Halleran, as he directed his field to secure his pack, each man his own dog. "Any day, sir; maybe near Droveen some time—when there'd be sthrangers out."

"Oh, thank you! Good God!" said the master of the foxhounds helplessly.

He was about to ride off when the Master of the Harriers, elated by all this *camaraderie*, stayed him. "Should the whole pack be too much, they would be only too pleased to 'lind' either Sphinster or Dhrummer, the two stars of the chase, for any meet at all."

"And they are capable," said Gervase, as he rode down hill, and gave sudden way to his mirth, "of bringing that old bitch in a lead to some meet, and offering her to me before either Blake or Purpert (neighbouring masters), with a reminder of how she killed the fox for me at Knockane."

Now this is a completely true story, let who will credit it, and it happened upon St. Stephen's Day. 1905.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW SANDY MADE A GRAVE MISTAKE

"No tangle's so tangled it cannot improve,
If the lover has brains."

—KIPLING.

EVIE HARTLAND, tired of her own company, tired of the fire she had loved to sit and dream over, of the soft wind and rains she had loved to go out in, tired of everything and unable to sit still, had taken to long walks. She was growing thinner, losing the fresh prettiness, and gaining a beauty of pale cheeks and big eyes, which replaced it.

She had not gone to the St. Stephen's Day Hunt, but went out along the hills to Athgarvan, walking on one of the narrow tracks through the heather, until tired by a strong wind, and the rough, uneven mountain, she turned downwards to the road, and sat in the shelter of Athgarvan's fir trees, glad to rest and get out of the blast. She could see across the road here—look to Droveen, lying low in a clump of trees . . . to Ballymacshane, with the flag which the old ladies insisted on, flying from the turret; to her own home, just visible and above her, fringed by the belt of larches to Graves' house, the house he wanted to take her to. Castleknock represented the gliding years of a wild child; a careless girl. Life took her early by the throat, forcing her with

cruel hands to look into its relentless eyes. Would she ever, growing careless about everything, accept this lean, good-looking man as her husband, and live behind the larches as My Lady. It appealed to a sore heart. She would be a person of weight. Mrs. Ievers could no longer patronise her. Neill—the word brought a breath of cleansing wind, sweeping mean thoughts before it—unless Neill married, and she was too young to realise the full torture of this, could she meet him as a mere friend?

Her little dog, a nondescript, brown-eyed mongrel, looked up and barked. Evie raised her eyes to see Graves striding along the road. A tall, narrow figure, clear against the grey sky.

"Evie," he said, stopping in astonishment. "Not hunting?"

"No. I'm keeping my horse for to-morrow," she said listlessly.

He noted her dejected attitude, the dull note in her voice, the new hollows in her white cheeks; a denser man would have recognised mental suffering.

"You look ill," he said kindly, and she smiled at him with eyes that thought of tears. He might then, if he chose, have made her at least his friend for life, but he was one of those men who, having lighted on an idea, pursue it to the death. He guessed that she knew now why people were cold to her; in his own mind he was not sure whether wrongly or no, and he believed he saw a delicate way to establishing a claim upon the girl's gratitude, one which might be enduring. "Evie," he said softly. She started nervously, fearing sentiment. "Evie, you know I see you're worried. About that new horse of yours. Everyone wants to know how you got him."

"Yes" —she raised her eyes to his, a curious light

in them, the nostrils quivering—"I know they do."

"Then, don't let them—say— Let people think I bought him for you—that I gave him to you. It will stop everything."

"Stop what? What do you mean? Besides, it would be a lie"—she shot the word out royally—"a lie which no one would believe. How well it would sound. Oh, by the way, I did not exchange that mare as I said. Sir Edmund gave me the chestnut. And why—WHY should I say this thing?" She knew why only too well, but would not let him see it, faced him, a slim young fury, flashing hot wrath. "I exchanged the horse. It was *true*, perfectly true. Is there any reason why it should not be so?"

"Because it's nonsense, on its face," he snapped out, afraid to explain further, angry because she had taken up this attitude. "That's why."

The girl's heart beat in her throat. Whatever chance Graves possessed died in that tense moment. He too believed her a thief. He proffered this idea that she—guiltless—might "clear herself."

"It is childish of you to take it like this. You might have come to a friend. I must help you out somehow if you won't help yourself. Look here, Evie."

"Oh, good-night" she said. "Don't help me by burdening yourself with a misspent generosity," and able to bear no more she went away swiftly.

Turning her head at a bend in the road, she saw Graves walking on, and she sank down again on the bank, sobbing helplessly now. What had she done that Fate should single her out? Why? The pitiful question the gods must weary of if they

listen at all to the poor, complaining earth mites as they weary in their brief span of life. The gods are immortal. If they do listen, perhaps they cannot understand what it is to have one life and waste that ; see youth pass, and age come, and never know happiness.

Evie sobbed on until the sound of hoofs roused her. She sat up, forcing back her tears, and dabbing her eyes with a soaked pocket-handkerchief, twisting her mouth to a smile.

A tenor voice trilled softly. Someone was happy then, and sang. Evie resented it. A dark nose came round the bend, and she saw Acland on Blackbird, the reins flapping trustfully on the mare's neck.

"Miss Evie," he cried, "I was coming to call. Standish said it would not injure Blackbird if I asked for a coverlet."

"Was it a good day?" Evie's voice wobbled.

"An excellent day. There were a pack of harriers, and we amalgamated and worked a combine ; hunted and overtook— Why, what's the matter?"

Evie turned her head away. He could hear something about horses—suspicion—the chestnut.

He grew pink. What was wrong about the chestnut? She was so pretty. He watched the lines of her rounded cheek, the beauty of her slender form. She was the prettiest thing he had ever seen, and he could not analyse the feeling which told him she lacked an indefinite something that someone else possessed.

"And—there's no one to help." She looked up at him, childishy piteous, with brimming eyes.

Sandy drew a quick breath. He could help. He was rich ; could give her many things—chestnut

horses, pretty clothes, and if she wished for it, expected him. She had singled him out. He got down and came near her, leaving his mare.

"Miss Evie," he said, "don't fret. Let me help. I've thought for some time that you showed you liked—"

"Oh, I do," she shot out, thinking of Neill. "Of course you've seen it, Sandy. I'm so glad you know."

He paled, for he had hardly expected so open an avowal. He would ask her now, he must, but there was a sigh at the heart of this modern Perseus as he came to look at Andromeda. Her beauty enthralled him, made his head reel. He stooped, taking her small, sun-browned hands.

"And—and—" Evie's face worked. She spoke quickly in uneven tones. "Oh, Sandy, I can't bear kindness. They suspect me of having stolen the diamond, of having gone to Cork to sell it. And I went to see about my eye; one hurt me. I was afraid it might be wrong. My mother was half-blind. But they believe I bought the chestnut with the money. Everyone does; Mr. Ievers and Neill. I know it. Why, Edmund Graves came here now, telling me I may use his name and say he gave it me."

"D—n him! Oh, but they can't, they couldn't!" burst out Acland, yet suddenly knew it was true, and saw many things clearly.

"To clear myself by a lie. Acknowledge myself a thief. Owe so much to him that I must marry him."

Acland muttered imprecations; she gave him no time to speak. At least, it was in his power to take her from all her troubles.

"And Neill—Neill thinks it. He begged me to tell him how I got the horse, and I knew nothing

but the truth. Neill's left me, doesn't come near me, and oh, I wish I was dead!" sobbed poor Evie, with the youthful fervour of one who is particularly anxious to live.

Have you ever seen a child's house of cards tumble from an elaborate, pointed building to a sudden flat nothingness? So Sandy's mental structure fell; but made of stronger things, it seemed to rain about his ears and stun him. Fool, he dubbed himself, and fool again! looking back and recalling a dozen incidents which ought to have shown him the truth. The meeting by the lake and the drives at Dunhaven; Nora's hints—but above all he was thankful. Evie by her sudden outburst, had saved him from the folly he contemplated. How she would have stared in astonishment—laughed perhaps. He buried the hope without rancour, with no thought for himself. Only sorrow for the child's sorrow, chiding for himself. This pretty, quivering thing loved Neill. Youth to youth, as it should be. Sandy felt her loveliness with a new sense of loss as the girl, looking at him, talked on.

It was impossible at any time, because Neill was poor and must marry money—he had said he would; but they had been happy; content to live in the present and hope for the mysterious something which might arrive from nowhere. Now it was all in ruins. She would always hate anyone who had ever dreamt of this horror; always like Sandy because he never imagined it. All this and more Evie poured out, sitting on the damp bank and weeping bitterly. Acland sat down beside her; everything merged in the desire to comfort this poor little girl he had dreamed of loving. Loving! He was not old; but he knew by Evie's complete

confidence that she thought him so. Twenty looks to forty-five as a dim and distant port, which, when reached, means mere stagnation, without hopes or fears. Happy twenty; smiling through its miseries; never knowing grief in its fulness as those do who encounter it hand-in-hand with the hopelessness of age! Young, we meet sorrow; but sorrow cannot stay with us. Its grey gloom flies from our tempestuous joys and woes. Older, it comes to stay—a grim, unwelcome guest; telling us in bitterest moods to look at the little shadows we had once taken for its sombre substance; shutting windows and doors on poor, little, smiling hope. All the youth of the world calls for the kindly sprite. He must go to them and leave those whose hour is past. They, wanting him most, must shut him out.

Evie sobbed on; Sandy, conscious of awkwardness, patting her hands, trying clumsily to help her. Then he spoke.

"Miss Evie," he said, "you exaggerate. I don't think people could honestly believe such a thing, and for the chestnut"—he stammered—"it was I . . . I arranged it."

"You—you!" she cried. "Why?"

"I thought you wanted him." He hung his head and blushed like a chidden child. "You had nothing else. I must tell it now. They all know I'm a fool about horses. I can say I took a fancy to the grey and was afraid of Standish, so bought her in that way."

"Oh, Sandy!" The girl laid impulsive hands on his. "Was there ever anyone so kind, so true a friend?"

"Your friend to eternity, Miss Evie," he said, and said good-bye to foolish hopes as he kissed her small

brown hands. "And if—if you had money"—he thought deeply—"it would be allowed then. Mr. Ievers would not mind."

"If the skies fall," said Evie gloomily. "Who would give me money? Besides, I can never forgive Neill, if he—suspected me himself; he—"

At this point Neill Ievers drove round the corner in his pony-cart. Two people perched on a bank on a chill, wintry afternoon, lends itself to the suspicion of a romantic assignation. Mr. Ievers, with a face of thunder, would have driven past; but Blackbird, with womanly sympathy, put herself across the road and stopped him. Neill remarked in biting tones that it was exceedingly fine weather for sitting out, and asked Acland to remove his black mare.

Sandy did not do so; he recognised jealousy, and leaving Evie, said sharply that some people were exceedingly stupid, and that on his way home from hunting he had happened to meet Miss Evie. Neill, now thunderous to clapping point, said he observed that, and tried to flick Blackbird out of his way—a liberty which she resented by all but braining the pony.

Sandy went up to the trap and put his hands upon it, so that it would upset him if it went on. He fronted the boy's lowering sullenness, and spoke in low tones, with an eloquence which surprised him. "Some people," he said, "were not only stupid, but idiots." For the first time he had found out how suspicion had fallen about the diamond. With some confusion he confessed his share in the matter, thrusting his cheque-book, which he always carried, under Neill Ievers' nose: "H. O'Neill—one chestnut horse, £40: not for self. How he had come along to find

the girl crying, unprotected from this awful slander; a prey to titled harpies, who offered themselves as sponsors for the horse's gift.

"Crying her eyes out because you—you were unkind to her—you young sweep. She told you the truth as far as she knew it. You who ought to thank Heaven because she's not engaged to Graves now."

Here Sandy, forgetting all his own sorrows, drew Blackbird to a stone and hastily mounted, ignoring Evie's faint prayers that he should wait for her. She wished to walk back with him. As Sandy jogged the mare on, he observed that Neill was already out of his cart. Sandy found Nora was at home, and they had tea together; her sympathy touching his hurts with kindly hand.

It was a little later when Evie, exceedingly meek, arrived with Neill in the pony-cart; her cheeks now matching her eyelids. He and Nora discussed Evie's future with almost parental interest.

"A clear case," said Miss Hartland, as she saw him off, "of want of money spoiling two lives, and no fairy godmother to step forward and wave her wand. Ten, twenty thousand pounds, a mere nothing to many people, yet these two must be apart without it."

"No," said Acland thoughtfully; "or even a godfather."

He rode home, tired and chilled, a rainbow phantasy clouded over for ever; yet he ate a good dinner, and sat long silent—"Jorrocks" on his knee, its pages unturned. He was thinking very deeply.

CHAPTER XIX

CONCERNING VARIOUS MATCHES

"Is nothing real but confusion ;
Is nothing certain save death ?

Gilt baubles we grasp at blindly,
Would turn in our hands to dross ;
'Tis a fate less cruel than kindly,
Denies the gain and the loss."

—GORDON.

SANDY rode alone to hunt next day, taking Robin Standish had arisen in the early dawning to sell cattle at a fair. It was another stone-wall meet ; the day was grey and still. Directed from Durra, he rode towards a great wood where the hounds were to be. Not a soul on the road ; loneliness personified. A grey and limitless country ; grey skies far and dim, dipping to a grey horizon. A pattern of grey, loose walls, some fringed with little thorns, running in grey tangles across the fields ; quiet on all sides, no sign of life save browsing sheep and cattle. The land seemed oversized, boundless. A wood two fields away looked as though half-an-hour's riding would not reach it. The trees of Moylish were misty and dark, a sombre mass of gloom. Rudyard Kipling writes of the weariness of an unprofitable dawning, the weariness of the day struck deep to Acland's heart. It frightened him in its limitless loneliness.

Concerning Various Matches

The fulfilling of mere life; the wideness of the misty world, awed his little soul. The many days of his saving, orderly life, his petty desires to make sixpences do for shillings, his secret joy in his riches, his own importance in the town across the seas, slipped from him as a loose cloak. He rode naked through the greyness, and was chilled and afraid. The woods grew no nearer; the ride was boundless as the day. The road dipped downwards to a network of cross-roads, when a man's voice spoke across the stillness. Sandy was clothed again, alive; he raised his head as the human note struck warm to his lonely soul. Only tinkers, ragged, cold, driving a cart with two donkeys hitched to it. They were grey too, and pinched and very worn; but one man, looking up bade the rider a cheery good-morning. "A fine, still day," he said, and shivered. Acland's hand slid to his pocket, touching money, his chastened heart wishing to give. His fingers felt a shilling, and fingered it doubtfully, old custom searching on for sixpence, then the grey fog rolled up, dark Moylish Wood receded. He threw the shilling and another. "Get a drink," he said abruptly.

He rode away thinking. He, Alexander Acland, had wasted money on a worthless vagrant and advised promiscuous drinking; so deeply had this new land and her wooing ways altered his orderly mind. Yet the tinker's thanks echoed warm in his wake, and ere he could despond again he cantered on, overtaking other riders to Moylish.

He had other things to think of, too, that morning, for a letter had arrived from Captain Partridge announcing the fact that the Crimson Rambler would win a big hurdle race on the following Saturday. "You can stick a bit on," said that

worthy; "but of course I can only rely upon your absolute silence to others."

Acland, with much trepidation, was thinking of putting on £10, but he handed the letter to Standish, forgetting secrecy, and to his intense dismay found himself involved in a wild plunge of fifty, of which Standish was to get a fourth. Standish had immediately written to a friend to put it on next day: there was no getting out of it. This had worried him; now it, too, fell away, driven forth by that lonely fog. What was £50 to him? What if he did lose it? with no one to come after him. Fifty, or fifty thousand; in his heart he knew he could afford either, and not materially miss it. For he was a very rich man; his years of economy had resulted in an ever-growing income. Dividends unspent, and invested until they grew and increased and multiplied, and the unobtrusive, stingy, little person riding Robin to the meet was owner of a quarter of a million in solid, well-invested cash—a sum which might have been doubled if he had sometimes risked a loss; but he had always moved warily, content with small safe profits, when other men, risking the chance of ruin, soared into sudden millionaires, and more than occasionally fell down again, unable to stop speculating. They asked Acland's opinion then, knowing how often the little man was right; how he could lay his finger on some weak spot in a gloriously glittering dream of gold, and point stolidly to some safer thing where a man might make shillings instead of millions.

Twenty thousand . . . thirty thousand pounds . . . he would not miss it. He scamped telegrams, went to unfashionable tailors, took 'buses instead of hansom, and yet could sell out so many thousands

and never miss their unspent interest. There was no fairy godmother to make two young people happy, but a fairy godfather ; a little, unromantic Londoner, with death jogging his elbow, might do it. Sandy had been worried yesterday ; the old flutter came at his heart, and he knew he was not cured. He could ride, but he could not walk far. Although each day seemed to make him stronger, there were hours when the old faintness seized him ; when he sat cold and helpless with leaden hands and feet, feeling the floor slip away, letting him down into a black numbness until roused by the faithful Phillips.

"Now, sir, dose of heart-bottle, sir ; that's right—thank you, sir," as the strong stimulant gripped his master and made him alive.

He would not miss the money ; they turned into the big wood and he saw Evie, Neill riding doggedly by her side, daring his mother's glances.

If Evie were an heiress. Someone who could live in her own house on her own money. Sandy rubbed his bewildered head and believed the fog must have numbed his brains.

Any man or woman who goes to Moylish knows what to expect. There are endless foxes, and one bounds after them through endless woods ; up and down narrow rides, branches swishing in one's face ; clattering on stony cart-tracks, sinking in soft earth, winding about trees ; completely losing the hounds and waiting at the main earth until a fox comes up to try it. On a fine day it is the wiser part to stay here altogether, and let the chase rave round one, saving a horse for a better chance later. This morning, as the fog lifted, it was mild as summer, sun striking down through the trees. Keen spirits hustled after the hounds in the hope of that phantom

break-away which had never occurred ; the Moylish foxes were old-fashioned country folk, living in their own domain. Others gathered near the earth, letting their horses crop scanty grass ; Graves and Acland and Nora Hartland among them. Neill and Evie were conspicuously apart, under the shade of a great beech. Graves rode a fidgety, raking thoroughbred, qualifying it for a cup which he wanted to win, but with small intention of ever taking it off the flat himself. It was a long, leggy brown, showing more quality than stamina, and its owner was vastly pleased with him. Patting the thoroughbred's neck, talked of the races he would win.

Now Acland, with his mind's eye yet filled with Captain Partridge's string, failed to be pleased.

"Not such a horse in the county," said Graves proudly.

Acland, mentally comparing the brown with Tarantelle, the probable winner of next year's Derby, shook a doubtful head.

"He does not appear to me to be large enough or strong enough," he said, in his precise way.

Graves, always ready for battle, and irritated by this new friendship of Neill and Evie, observed that he did not know Mr. Acland was a great judge of race-horses.

"I have seen some," said Acland sharply ; "several—at a training stable. Exceedingly fine race-horses. Your animal appears small in comparison."

The etiquette of horse-flesh should have taught him that whatever he thought of Dark Boy, the thoroughbred, he should have admired the horse ; but Acland knew none of these niceties. His heart was hot against Graves, and his blundering, palpably interested offer to Evie, concerning the chestnut

Sir Edmund snorted crossly. He was in a bad temper.

"I'll gallop him three miles on the flat £100 a side against any horse in the county," he said. "And May Moon over the country same distance. Make it £200 against anything of yours, Acland," with a sneer.

Would he! What about that noble animal, the Crimson Rambler, able to win races in England in good company. Standish had told him it was a big race with good horses in. Anything of his? He had a perfect right to the Rambler.

"Will you take me, Acland," sneered Graves, "as you don't admire my horse?" He saw Evie look round. "I'll double the stakes against anything you can start. Owners up, you know."

"Against anything I can start! Make it five hundred!" thundered Sandy, with the same unexpected outburst that had worsted the bailiff.

"Oh, look here, you know. Are you sober?" queried the baronet, in genuine astonishment.

Sandy would have made it a thousand now. Was the memory of Michael Malone's whisky to haunt him for ever? He observed with great dignity that he believed he was not drunk, and he meant the wager.

He did not care now what it cost him; his blood boiled. Against Dark Boy and May Moon. The latter across country, remember that.

"Yes," said Sandy, "on this chestnut or Blackbird. I understand;" but his heart bumped.

To ride this unknown Holy Robin across three miles of fields and jumps; to sit those mighty bounds; run the risk of many falls; to hold the pulling youngster, and compete against that brilliant

hunter, May Moon, Graves' best mount ; timber her one failing. Yet had the ride been across the great, banked-up thorns at Aintree, the flat race down Holborn, Sandy would not have flinched. Graves' sneering face was a sharp, rowelled spur, goading him on. Amusement, contempt, astonished disbelief flitting there in turn over the thin features.

He hated this good-looking man. Whatever happened to Robin he could compass his downfall with Crimson Rambler, and he would do it. A man who could stoop to make mischief between a man and a maid deserved anything.

"Well, if May Moon breaks her back you may get home across country, but the idea of the flat race is childish!" said Graves.

Other people gathered, laughing.

"I'll have a side bet of fifty I beat you on the flat," flashed out the little man stoutly.

"On Blackbird," whistled Graves.

"I have other animals," said Acland quietly.

Graves poised his pencil above a page of his note-book.

"You're not to buy," he said ; "that's understood. The match is against your present possessions. Anything you've a right to ride now."

Acland coloured.

"I shall race you with my own horses," he said, "engaging not to buy anything for the purpose. Is that sufficient? I will not specialise the animals' names."

Graves said it was, and laughed aloud. Blackbird against May Moon, Robin against his thoroughbred ; both ludicrous certainties for him.

They wrote out the agreement there and then. A match of three miles over a country, the course to

be chosen by a committee, to be followed by a second two miles on the flat, between horses at present the property of A. Acland and E. Graves. £200 a side in each case, and a side bet of an even £50 on the flat race.

The Hunt gathered, laughing, as Graves told them. The Englishman was mad or not sober—this Graves' suggestion. Sir Edmund, blindly unconscious of a distant Crimson Rambler, spent the money already. He wanted a new car; it would help to buy it.

Acland sat still; so preoccupied that he chastised Robin for attempting to move, and was all but thrown by the answering plunge.

"He thinks I'm afraid—that I'll never start," he fumed to Nora.

"He'll fall off," chuckled Graves to a friend.

"Fall off," said Sandy furiously. "I'll beat him, I'll beat him if Tom has to tie me on."

That was all very well, jump races depended on were the fortune of war, but Nora shook her head at Blackbird.

"It's madness, Sandy," she said kindly—"absolute madness; and not as if you could afford to lose, either. How can you think of racing Blackbird against that race-horse? Why, if he jumps well, he's going to Punchestown."

Acland smiled; his faith was deep-rooted in the Crimson Rambler. He rode with Nora through the wood, keeping the horses warm, paying little attention to the chorus which swelled and died as hounds came near or passed on.

"It will make you so poor—Sandy," Nora said, with kindly sympathy. "I don't know how you could."

Acland laughed softly.

"I can afford it," he said. "It's an outburst of extravagance, gratification of a personal dislike. I hate the man, Nora."

The sun glinted through the trees, lacquering the moss with silver; hounds drew near them, and the hunted fox, having given his usual look at the main earth, slipped off again, getting tired of fox-hunting.

Nora watched the quivering bars of light, saw the hounds come and go.

"Edmund reciprocates," she said drily. "You took, indirectly, one woman away, and now most directly, having acted as peacemaker, you are taking another. I was beginning to believe his chance a strong one last week. Something went wrong with Evie."

"You did not know, then? Nor did I," he said, and told her.

He had not had time last night. If Nora could have slain Mrs. Ievers with fiery words, that lady must have dropped, stricken to death from her car. It was upon Nora's mind to rush upon her, and deal justice with a hunting crop, but Acland stopped her. That, he said, was his part, he had originated the mystery of the chestnut horse, and he must clear it up to-morrow, perhaps that evening, if they went into Moylish.

"I seem to have dropped suddenly into life, coming over here," he said, as they paced along. "London was mere routine—I shall have a great deal to look back to." His voice saddened.

Evie and Neill were still standing together, oblivious of chilled steeds. He would have much to look back to, and yet—he could almost have shaken his mental self; despite fluttered heart and vanity, he did not feel unhappy.

"You will not come back, then?"

Nora's grey eyes were firm on the sunlit moss; her voice was indifferent, yet curiously strained.

"One never knows—London claims one. I shall drop into its ways again, go to the office—make money—I shall want it—go to parties—saunter in the Park and live on, until I break down once more: I—it was touch and go."

"If I were you," said Nora, in the same voice, "I should abandon money-making, and make the cure permanent—there are better things than mere money, Sandy."

He looked at her pretty, unlined face, with its clear, Irish skin, and deep, grey eyes. . . . What a life's companion some man had missed in this feckless, extravagant woman.

"Yet supposing you had married and been poor in the ordinary sordid way. Australian meat, margarine, and hashes; instead of horses and writs, would you have liked it, Nora?"

"No; I must be poor my own way," she said quietly. "But so very little would make me rich. I could have taken the man of my heart to Castleknock and made him happy on a very few hundreds a year." She raised her eyes suddenly—their brightness was gone, and her lonely soul looked through their clear windows. "It would have been something to have made someone happy before one's call comes," she added, her voice soft. "Come, Sandy—they've killed or put him to ground."

It was to ground; Moylish holes are innumerable and unstoppable. They left the great place there, drawing another covert outside and running back again into the woods—there was only one small jump, over which Holy Robin soared swiftly as a driven grouse, to the immense discomfiture of his

rider. Three miles upon this animal — Acland shivered unhappily, wondering whether Robin's fall at a bank or his over a stone wall would first occur. But he kept it all to himself, and smiled stoutly at the muttered comments he heard about him. Graves had told the story of the matches to everyone.

He went round, declining to risk Dark Boy's fetlocks over the gap. The little Cockney was a fool, and more; no doubt because Blackbird had once been first in a slow hunt he imagined her a race-horse. They laughed openly, some chaffing Acland, but he said nothing. Tom had assured him that Robin could outstrip the four winds of heaven, and was bred from winners of many races. Crimson Rambler he felt sure of. They went in, as he had hoped, at Moylish. Mrs. Ievers was already there, roasting over a huge wood fire; she was alone and defenceless by her tea-cups, while the others trooped to cold meat and poached eggs—things not eaten decorously in a drawing-room.

To her came Sandy Acland, abandoning the delights of a merry party, and stood by the fire. Mrs. Ievers, with the politeness of a levelled pistol, giving him tea. He was nervous, but he meant to see it through.

"Cream and sugar," he said slowly; "two lumps." But he passed his cup irresolutely. "I did not come to drink tea; I came to see you—alone."

Mrs. Ievers raised an outraged yet bridling face.

"To see and speak to you. There has been mischief done—a base suspicion set afloat and kept afloat by you. Now don't be silly. You cannot be inhuman, and I mean you to hear me. Is it not true to start with, that no diamond was sold in Cork?"

Mrs. Ievers believed it was. That all inquiry had proved this.

"Wait. More, that poor Evie went to an oculist there, afraid of one of her eyes, and returned, beaming, finding it was nothing. We can prove that. Come, Mrs. Ievers, listen!"

He told the episode of the chestnut horse, and this matter made clear by direct evidence—he put the injustice of it all clearly. He grew eloquent. He forgot that a well-filled tea-cup is not the best thing to emphasise speech with, and as he talked on, the unhappy lady he spoke to dodged and winced from an unceasing sprinkle of hot liquid, mopping it with unwonted patience from cloak and face.

"You started it. I cannot blame you. But it is for you to make reparation," he said sternly. "Be civil to the girl—show your suspicions are at rest—the flock of sheep will follow; theft is a bitter word, and—and—there is an attachment between your son and Evie—if she were not poor—had a little money—a few thousands—"

Custom made him temporise then.

"Neill's wife must have £30,000. It's a barren title—a big place." Mrs. Ievers spoke firmly. "That, or less and position. I am sorry about Evie, Mr. Acland—I really am, but the rest is folly."

He said nothing more then, thinking; but wrapped as she was in swathings of complacency, the fat woman was not inhuman. She was sorry for the stone she had set rolling; seeing now that the girl was wholly innocent, had been cruelly wronged. So much she promised with contrition, frowning at the rest—no nonsense between those two—her son and the girl.

Having finally upset a great deal of tea, Acland imagining he had drunk it, poured out more.

"It is for you to refute this base suspicion," he said sternly—a very Shylock exacting his pound of flesh. "Smaller things have ruined a life. Scandals are like cancers, hard to cure."

He was a fat little Bayard towering over a silken-clad foe. The tea-bedewed lady considered the question, and the party from the dining-room came in; Evie last, shy among these friends who had suspected her, her sweet mouth drooping, her eyes sad. Neill believed and knew, but others did not. The fog of coldness clung to her, and she was afraid. The word "thief" blotted out her sunshine. Mrs. Ievers looked up.

"You are cold, Evie; sit by me," she said, in meek tones. "Have you had tea, child?" Evie's heart thumped; a flood of scarlet stained her cheeks. "And why did you never tell us, dear, that Mr. Acland gave you that nice chestnut for Christmas? Giving out silly tales as you did about an exchange. Fortunately O'Neill told people. You have not been near us since the wretched day when the jackdaw upset the diamonds. And I hope your eyes are well—so you went to Cork to get them seen to, didn't you, the day after the unfortunate affair?"

Her voice was purposely clear. Married men took glad notes for their wives; Evie was a favourite. Women who had snubbed her flushed repentantly. Mrs. Ievers had spread the tale; evidently she wanted to contradict it. A flood of happiness poured across Evie's heart; her tea was nectar.

Acland, remembering Holy Robin, rose to go. He squeezed Mrs. Ievers' hand, clambered on to his tall steed and jogged home alone through the

stillness. But not lonely now—the happiness of the two lives flitted with him through the grey dusk. He had done something, he must do more. The power of money was his, and he would use it. The sweet face of the girl rose before him, and he grieved, but not sorely—she had not been for him. Loneliness was his portion, till he slept and was at rest.

Diffidently he broke the news to Tom, to be acclaimed by the groom as a hero.

“If ye can but remain above, ye have it won,” he declared, “for May Moon is the devil’s own lepper, but no galloper at all. She won’t bate this horse.”

Acland timidly proffered a query as to Robin’s remaining above.

“An’ we won’t school the sowl from him till he larns his work, sir. Put yerself above on him and ride him over the narry bank near Droveen till he’s tired of fallin’.”

“Oh!” said Acland, failing to hail the prospect with joy.

“Never fear, sir, he’ll be turned out as fit as hands can make him . . . and maybe May Moon I’ll be huntin’ him home—but for the other—” Tom held a drink up to Robin with one hand and scratched his head with the other. “’Twas a queer match for the black mare, sir.”

“It will be — when I race her” said Acland, going in.

Standish having just asked if there was no hospital for incurables to give money to, abandoned grumbling as Sandy explained.

“Sandy—you’re a treasure,” he said, with a solemn gravity. “If you can but sit on, you have him fairly boxed.”

"It is on the flat," said Acland, with indignant dignity.

"If you can only stick on," repeated Standish, "We'll tie your legs under the saddle, Sandy."

"Hitt!" said Acland, going to dress.

CHAPTER XX

OF GRATITUDE AND OTHER THINGS

"They're neck and neck, they're head and head ;
They're stroke for stroke in the running ;
The whalebone whistles, the steel is red,
No shirking as yet or shunning.

.
The chestnut outpaces, outstretches the brown."

—GORDON.

Telegrams.

"SHALL not send horse. Are you mad ? Reply paid.
—Partridge."

"Am not. Request use of Rambler as per letter."
—From Acland, Ballymacshane, to Partridge, Croxton.

"Halfpenny over, Phillips; most annoying." This
from Acland.

"You are mad, but suppose must humour you.
Will arrange. If anything happens to horse hold
you responsible. Horse won to-day. Eights."—
From Partridge, Croxton.

"What an exceedingly extravagant telegram,"
said Acland. "No answer, Phillips, I shall write
and save fivepence."

"Certainly, sir," said Phillips, going out.

Standish advised the horse coming over in good time, so as to get over his sea-sickness, and Acland duly wrote "that he expected the Rambler to be sent at latest on 17th, so as to have quite recovered from the journey on the 31st. He did not know if Yanitas would be of use. He wished a good, careful man to be also forwarded; one who would understand the animal's requisite rations, exercise, and housing. No harm should come to the Crimson Rambler, and he"—here Acland waved his pen and wrote blackly—"didn't care what it cost if he beat Sir Edmund Graves' Dark Boy. A leggy and weakly-looking animal which I feel confident cannot overtake the Rambler in his gallop. I am most pleased to hear of the animal's present success, and trust the stakes were adequate. He has been a heavy expense. Then he was his truly, "A. ACLAND."

To this came a reply by telegram:

"Still think you dotty. Never mind; lick the other fellow. Horse leaves 17th, *via* Waterford, insured. Boy in charge.—Partridge."

Standish having won £80, hastened away to buy a horse. He knew a slashing, fine three-year-old, but which he had not seen his way to affording. He also gave Miss Catty a Persian kitten and Miss Susie a sitting of eggs. Acland put his £300 away with good care, giving Phillips and Tom £8, each—they had clamoured for a sovereign on—and regretfully noting this depletion.

It was a week without hunting. Blackbird was coughing, and even if he had wished to, Tom would not have allowed Robin to be taken out. Acland could always ride him a school when he desired, but

hunting was too dangerous. The match was the theme of conversation, from old aunts to kitchen boys at Ballymacshane. Acland, perched on Robin, took daily exercise over the low fences in the paddock, full of hopes that he might learn to stay on, but doubtful to the point of despair. The days were dark and lowering, snow sheltering behind a bitter, south-east wind, and he was not so well. Business matters worried him; he could not make up his mind to trust to Mr. Jones. The head clerk wrote, advising great buying in certain shares. Acland, too far away to see for himself, was uncertain. The shares dwelt, wavered, and began to creep up, evidently bolstered by some big syndicate. To buy was wise; to know when the bubble would be pricked, and when to sell out, was another thing. But he allowed Mr. Jones to invest, despite his own opinion, and became the possessor of more shares than he cared for. They crept up. Wires flashed too and fro, absolutely bewildering Miss Punch as she wrote them out, and the strain affected the little man's health. He could not eat. The dull, heavy feeling crept back; it was a distinct warning that he must not meddle in business—that his cure was far from complete.

He walked in the big garden, sheltered from the driving wind, a sheaf of telegrams in his hand. Shares were rising steadily, excellently; there was no cause for anxiety. Better make a larger profit. So said Mr. Jones. Acland shook his head; he might give away thirty thousand, but to lose on speculation broke his heart. His careful methods had kept him clear of loss. He thought on walking up and down, worrying his head until half the good of his Irish rest-cure was swept away.

The whole county of Tulloun—that is, the sporting portion of it—talked of nothing but the impending match. They roared over it out hunting; they shrugged shoulders, and imagined reasons, and imitated Sandy's bumping seat and over-high hands. He was a good little fellow; he went well, but he was a foolish man, daring to challenge one of their crack riders to two matches, and for substantial sums. Robin, the big, raking chestnut, might possibly wear down May Moon, but Blackbird . . . the old whistling mare, pulled out against a thoroughbred for three miles on the flat. No one thought of anything except Blackbird—Graves sneered openly, the hunt chuckled, Standish preserved his own counsel, and gravely agreed with Graves' suggestion that Sandy must of course have been drunk. "Terrible fellow," he said. "Even camphor or sugar does for him." And here he burst into one of his disturbing roars of laughter, and rode away. Must have been drunk! Men stared at Sandy Acland with his exceedingly sober, rather pallid face. But it explained the matter.

In the meantime, heralded by a wire from Captain Partridge, which set forth at a halfpenny per word that Acland was a hanged fool, and horse had left via Waterford, there arrived at Ballymacshane that slightly aged but fine handicap horse, the Crimson Rambler, ridden by a wizened boy of uncertain years; who sniffed with suspicion at all things Irish, locked his steed's door in Tom's face, told the head groom that his straw was damp and his oats musty, his bran bad, and then succumbing to an unknown influence, was sworn friend to them all by bed-time, going arm-in-arm with Tom to bid the Rambler good-night.

When he heard of the match, he slapped his shrunken thighs with enjoyment. The old Rambler was to win two fairly big handicaps in the spring; coming back to flat racing, now they found he was all right. When he saw Acland next morning exercising Robin, his jaw fell, and he ceased to smile. This was another matter. As to keeping quiet, that was his trade; the only thing he was ever instructed to tell were lies intended to spread.

But of course it leaked out that there was a new horse at Ballymacshane. Ellie told her sister at Droveen, the yard-boy told his cousin, it drifted at length to the ears of Sir Edmund Graves, and he sped, petrol driven, to Ballymacshane to find out the truth.

Acland and Standish were in, surrounded by a crowd of callers; they received him pleasantly. The match itself was fixed for the next day, Friday, and Acland had worked himself into a ferment of nervousness. Robin did not inspire confidence. Graves came striding in, his lean face set crossly.

"What's this about a new horse?" he snarled sharply. "It was specially stipulated you were not to buy one. Is it yours or Standish's?"

"I've bought nothing," said Acland mildly. "I agreed to run one which I owned then, and intend to do so."

Graves subsided relieved. It would then be old Blackbird and Robin, one for each race. He had driven into the yard on his arrival and endeavoured to gather information, vainly, of course. Tom was invisible, the English boy hidden; the youth who answered him knew nothing of horses.

"Some fool's tales, I s'pose," said Graves. "It's a mad affair. I'll let you off now. Acland, for half

forfeit. You know you must have been mad to think of it."

"Or drunk," said Standish sombrely. "Sad thing, Sandy."

"Standish," said Acland immediately at white heat. "At eleven in the morning?"

"All the sadder," said Standish. "Oh, don't laugh." This to the chuckling audience; while Acland, pent by impotent anger, reduced the fire to ruins.

They had tea. How their forefathers would have breathed contempt to see half-a-dozen men enjoying tea and buttered toast—and they gave Sandy so much shrewd advice, such kindly warnings, that he wondered how many pieces he would be brought home in. Phillips came in with a telegram.

Acland read it anxiously; his face growing pale, and his heart thumping ominously. He wrote his answer quickly.

"At once, Phillips," he said shortly. "This is important."

"I'll run him down in my motor, I'm just off," said Graves, getting up. His mind was at rest about the horse, and he did not want to stay. Or shall I send it for you?"

"Phillips had better do so, thank you," said Acland, biting his fingers, a habit of his when worried. "This is very important."

It told of the fluctuation of this last deal. He wanted to communicate with Mr. Jones, but as that worthy would probably have gone home, he could not hope for an answer before the morning. The whole thing worried him; the slightest anxiety brought back all the old symptoms of brain fag and nervous exhaustion.

The day of the match was auspicious : the wind passed, and a fair, blue sky smiled softly. No showers, an almost balmy temperature. One of Ireland's coy glances, after a week of black looks. Sunshine glinted on the network of bare branches in the valley, yet no more unhappy man than Sandy Acland ever got into his morning tub, and then explored the depths of Neill Ievers' pink coat. The coat was not a fit ; the little man saw himself immersed in wrinkling billows of bright-coloured cloth, and he came down ill-pleased. His inclination was to toy with tea and toast ; but Standish advised two boiled eggs, and Sandy had to eat them. This treatment, combined with a moderately strong peg before they started behind the plough horses, partly restored him. They drove off cheerfully ; orders left for any telegrams to be despatched to the course. Robin had gone on, and Crimson Rambler was to follow.

A committee of four had chosen the three miles over a fair hunting country. It was flagged here and there to guide them at turning-points ; they were to ride to a white farm-house, round it and come home, finishing up a long field where the whole country seemed to have gathered. Traps, motors ; a crowd of country people. Acland shivered, quite objecting to so much notoriety.

For the two miles on the flat some fences had been levelled, making a fair course which they had to go round twice. May Moon was a compact, well-bred hunter, but so far as condition went the chestnut Robin showed more muscle and bloom—Tom made few mistakes about horses—May Moon had done no preparation, yet Graves looking on the race as a gift. Dark Lad, on the contrary, was rather too finely

drawn, and looked as if he might have been spared some of his gallops.

The horses came up—Graves looking at Robin.

"I thought you'd chance him on the flat," he said, "and try the mare across the leps. You're a brave man, Acland."

Sandy smiled. He knew of the surprise now pacing from Ballymacshane. But his last shred of support seemed to leave him when Tom placed him in the saddle, and let the bridle go. He was desolately alone, perched upon this overfresh steed.

"Kape a howlt of his head," entreated the groom, "and for God's sake, sthick to him. Be mane or saddle or bridle, but remain above on him. Oh, Jakers! ye vilyin."

This, as Holy Robin soared skywards in an agile buck, and Acland bowed, wide-legged, to the red mane.

Graves, now mounted, smiled. He was an ideal horseman. Long, lean, sitting close to his powerful mare, his hands low. Yet he was a rough man on an untrained horse; his horses were obliged to go his way, and the result was often disaster. They were a complete contrast as they walked on.

"Sthick to him," wailed Tom. "Ye have but a snaffle, so ye can't knock him."

At this moment Crimson Rambler, sedate and rather bored, was ridden up, and Acland smiled through his sadness, as wizened boy got down to watch.

They were ranged up, facing a low bank.

"Go!" said Gervase, who started them.

May Moon slipped off at a smart canter. Robin plunged, raked his head away, and darted past her like a whirlwind. The first bank was low and broad;

fortunately the chestnut found time to deliver an absent flick with a hind leg, and so escaped disaster. Then finding himself quite unchecked and alone, he grew quieter, and dropped to a lopping, aimless canter. May Moon, held together, striding easily along, overtook and passed him. Sandy remembered Tom's orders, which were to follow the mare, and trust to the chestnut's turn of speed at the finish. So he hauled hard at the bridle, and did it literally, going on May Moon's heels in a most disturbing fashion; bucketing up and down to the somewhat sprawling gallop of a weak-hocked horse. They encountered two easy banks, which Robin cleared handsomely, all but landing on his leader. So far it seemed any man's race. Sir Edmund, going a little fast to escape being jumped on, knew that without accidents it was his. He shrugged his thin shoulders, turning to watch Sandy's horsemanship. But matters were not to proceed so smoothly. Standish had remembered May Moon's peculiarity, and had arranged the course so that they encountered a long hedge, with a stiff baulk of timber secured in the gap—the thin spots in the carefully mended. Graves swore suddenly; the stick was thick, but he hoped the “d—n Cockney” might smash it, so he checked his mare. Sandy, finding himself forging ahead, saw the obstacle, and as he galloped loose-reined towards it, wondered if Robin would do it well. He was answered a second later by the chestnut taking it with his knees and turning over handsomely and surprised by the subsequent arrival of Graves, a stride behind, also upon his head. The brown had refused, answered deep scoring spurs, and turned over. It sobered Robin, and it blew May Moon. Graves jumped to his feet, delayed by a

dropped whip. Acland, finding a stone, was but little later, and they galloped on, both rather battered and side by side, Graves growling furiously "that he could not think why they had been brought that way."

"I really do not know," answered Sandy, puffing. "At least it was fortunate that we both succumbed," and was surprised by his opponent's glare.

Every big fence had its fringe of commenting, cheering onlookers, and one or two followed on horseback. The cottage was close now, and the race half-over. Sandy, having been forbidden by his rival to follow so close, was to Graves right, about half a length behind; the chestnut striding easily and jumping brilliantly, if unsafely. He was quick on his legs as a rabbit. They swung round the house, and came down at a broad stream with boggy lake off and landing. Robin, who dreaded water, rushed at it like an express train, and stopped dead, swerving aside; shooting his rider over his head, to follow immediately himself; for the mare, unable to avoid him, struck him broadside on, and all four wallowed in the muddy little river, which was deep.

"Heavin save us, and they all swhimmin' like ducks!" yelled suddenly appearing spectators flashing to the rescue; dragging horses and men to land, shrieking hot sympathy. Acland and May Moon were first out, and despite the mud-choked man's protests, they flung him on to the dripping, snorting mare, and started him with a whack—a second later presenting, with all hopes of gratitude, Robin to Sir Edmund, who was now covered with slime and incoherent from rage. "Aisy, aisy; sure, ye couldn't help fallin'," they said sympathetically.

"Cockney! tailor! fool!" were the mud-flavoured words sent in Sandy's wake as Graves danced upon the bank; thrust Robin aside, and cursed everything that had ever drawn breath. He would not take the most obvious course, which was to have mounted Robin and pursued. His own mare, driven wild by the thumps and shouts, had careered for half a field before the little Englishman, who had no stirrups, could stop her.

"An' what are ye off for?" shrieked an offended helper, when Sandy slid to the ground and trotted back with the mare.

He thought it was unkind of Graves to snatch the bridle and mount without a word.

"An' whin ye might be home," reproached O'Neill's nephew, running up with the chestnut. "Up with ye. Success! An' couldn't ye ride her it on anyways?" said a wrinkled old man crossly. "Wouldn't he take ye as well?"

May Moon was half a field in front, but not going easily. Robin, now the fresher of the two, caught her up and pounded close behind her, yet the odds laid by the spectators were five to one on the Baronet. They were screamed from fence and hill, and wafted down to them. Acland sat up, clenched his teeth, and made some semblance of holding his horse together. He did not mean to be beaten if he could help it, nor was he hopeless; so far his disasters had included his rival, and he felt that if he could do Robin justice, he might still win. They were getting close to the finish. Graves looking back, smiled. He knew he could not get every inch out of a horse, and that the Cockney, as he dubbed him, would lose his head, bucket in the saddle, drop his reins and use his whip, and generally spoil any chance he might possess.

Then, as guided by flags, they jumped into a flat rushy field, the smile died, and was wiped away by a muttered curse. Timber again; a low, easy gap at the end of the fence, which was wired. The field to their left was a treacherous place full of slimy bog-holes, and in any case he must keep within the flags. He took his mare by the head, drove home his spurs, and rammed her at the stick, guessing shrewdly who had arranged this fence as he did so. But the brown was blown and soured, she hated timber, dreaded another fall; she swerved suddenly across the low wall, going hard for a few strides before her rider got her in hand, and then, paif! she was wallowing to her girths in a *soufflet* of peat and water. Sandy followed without hesitation; originality in horse-racing was not his *métier*. He took the same hole a few yards from his opponent, but with little comment, believing it to be part of the game.

"Very soft going," he remarked pleasantly, as the tired horses heaved and strained.

Graves' reply was to the effect that of all the something-somethings this was the somethingest. Moreover, it all being due to a something cousin of Acland's, he wished some something fools would keep their mouths shut, or get drowned and be obliged to.

He struggled out of the hole and stood on a patch of firm ground, a dripping, gloomy figure. Should he go back, chancing the timber and the inevitable return wallow through the first morass—or on, chancing the bog-holes? There were safe passages in the field, and he might light on them. Sandy waited with unabated politeness for his decision.

Graves studied the green patches, the brown gleams of water; he would go on. He put spurs

to May Moon, choosing a firm-looking way, and immediately clove the depths of another morass, as immediately followed by Sandy who kept within a few feet, riding dutifully to Tom's orders. If bog-holes were included in cross country races, he felt he must merely endure them.

It was not betting now, but laughter which floated from the hill, as the two struggled on, their horses gasping and straining ; while behind O'Neill's nephew, who had left his horse and was skimming round the safe edges like a sand-piper . . . shrieked unheeded advice and warned them of unfathomable abysses.

"Keep left—for God's sake, keep left. There's a hole there that waters hell. Didn't me aunt's cow go down once and we couldn't get even a thrace of her horns— Oh, ye're in it agin, near the very sphot."

Side by side, yard by yard, foot by foot, the rival men came on ; wallowing their way, churning brown slime, squirting up muddy water, driving their exhausted, sobbing steeds to further effort. Sometimes the poor brutes stood still, unable to fight their way through the mass of earth and water which sucked at their aching limbs.

So still onwards, one silent, one rumbling bitter curses, until they got through the last hole and reached the rim of soft but sound-like grass bordering the swamp. Unfortunately, it was fenced by a fair, sized ditch, with an uncertain, muddy-looking bottom. The horses faced it exhausted, unable to jump ; they panted and trembled, their necks white with foam.

Presently, urged by whip and spur, May Moon simply walked into the ditch, and was pulled out by her master, while Robin, younger and more ambitious, jumped it with a weary grunt. The way was now

clear, they had to swing to the right, and get into the run home, which had lain beyond the stick.

"An exceedingly strange place to bring us through," said Sandy reproachfully, kicking Robin into a canter.

"To bring us through!" The world must for a space have been bereft of bitterness, so much of it lay in the glance Graves shot at his rival. "I wish to God I'd been born a fool," he snapped, as he on his part commenced to hold his mare together, and try to gallop on.

Sandy made no reply, he was too busy; galloping was a thing of the past. The horses' necks were stretched painfully, they moved stiffly; their breath came in piteous sobs; they compassed a feeble, rocking canter, while yells of laughter and encouragement urged the riders to effort. The crowd, ever helpful, closed in, whacking the poor brutes' quarters with sticks and hats; running beside them with comments and advice.

With spur and whip, his face set savagely, Graves drove May Moon half a length ahead. Robin responding to a frantic thump from O'Neill's nephew stole it back, and drew level. The horses staggered as they went, they were only trotting now.

The trot died to a jog—the powers of the best hunters are limited—the jog to a walk, and they kept nose to nose.

Whenever Graves' horsemanship wrested six foot or so, O'Neill's nephew running behind saw that Robin drew level.

Riding, whipping, spurring, they walked past the post, past the judge—who was sitting upon the ground doubled up by helpless merriment, past other men who laughed and mopped their eyes and laughed

again, and then the hapless steeds stopped, and the men, mud-besmeared, battered, glared at each other.

"I was first," said Graves.

"Ye was not," contradicted O'Neill's nephew, with emphasis. "I'll swhear I pulled the horse's head out pasht ye at the posht."

His last resource had been to haul Holy Robin by the bridle with his left hand, while he smote the chestnut under the stomach with his right. Two of Graves' tenants, inspired by shilling bets, were hammering May Moon with their hats.

For fully two minutes, Mr. Gervase, now lying flat, resisted all inquiries as to his decision, then getting up, he murmured something which resembled dead heat, and sat down again, pointing with a trembling finger to the timber gap.

"What does that mean?" asked Sandy eagerly.

"Run it all over again. In any case, you're both disqualified, wrong course," said the master unevenly.

Sir Edmund Graves was understood to remark that he would rather be eaten by his satanic majesty than go back, but he did not put it so prettily.

"What took ye to the bog-holes?" inquired Tom, as he sponged out Robin's nostrils, and hoped the horse might not die. "Why couldn't ye come on straight, with the race in ye're fist?"

"Didn't you tell me to follow him?" said Sandy plaintively. "I did it throughout."

"An' nothing but a low sthick forninst ye," muttered Tom helplessly. "There's some ye'd waste breath tryin' to talk sinse to."

"The finest race ever ye see," cried O'Neill's nephew. "They upsettin' ache other each minnit with the dинth of jealousy. Sure, one wouldn't ever

let the other into the bog-holes without he'd be there too."

Amid roaring cheers Sandy reached the shelter of a waggonette, where, aided by Phillips and an open umbrella, he managed to change; a neighbouring farmer supplying clothes.

"Very distressing, sir," said Phillips, laying the soaked bundle down. "Now, had I been upon the Robin, sir—"

"Phillips!" rasped out his master irritably.

"Allow me to dry your hair, sir," said Phillips, changing the subject.

The flat race was yet to be run. Acland, now arrayed in tweed breeches and gaiters and a pink racing-jacket, emerged from his dressing-room, and saw with pleasure the quiet pacing to and fro of Crimson Rambler, whose wizened attendant had almost succumbed from merriment. His pleasure damped by one thing . . . he knew they would not believe the tale in England.

Sir Edmund Graves, still in his soaked boots and breeches, but wearing a borrowed tweed coat, saw the big horse with the tube in his throat and stopped.

"What horse is that?" he queried sharply, struck with sudden suspicion.

"Mr. Acland's Crimson Rambler, sir," replied the boy.

"Won two weeks ago at Lewes. Excellent animal, Sir Edmund," put in Phillips, who had come down.

Sir Edmund stammered, implied cheating, raved at everyone English, and doubted the whole affair. The wizened boy, evidently following instructions, produced a paper.

"Mr. A. Acland's Crimson Rambler. By Fiery

Dawn . . . Rosebush." Graves turned blankly on to Sandy.

"It was deceit, if not open cheating," he stormed. "How was I to know you owned a race-horse?"

"My ownership of the animal," observed Sandy mildly, "was the immediate reason of my taking your challenge."

"Oh, was it?" said Graves limply. "Was it?"

"Not drunkenness, as you imagined," perused Acland placidly. "I may be a Cockney and a tailor, but I was not likely to compete with horses of ordinary speed against a racing animal."

Graves said nothing. He did not even snort—it seemed inadequate.

They were then started, and when Sandy had discovered that a race-horse's powers of pulling quite eclipse a hunter's, and learnt how to control the big horse, he knew the race was over. Dark Lad, going greenly, did his best; but the old horse when let go simply galloped away from him and won by ten lengths. This time the cheers were genuine, and Sandy, white from excitement and fatigue, took a long drink gladly.

"Exceedingly profitable," he said happily, and was handed a sheaf of telegrams.

He tore them open anxiously. Far away as he was, he had judged correctly. The shares were trembling, would sink like lead, and Mr. Jones must clear immediately.

"Hit. Rapid. All chickens corn," he wrote. Translated, it read: "Sell immediately all shares in Gravelot mine."

Graves saw him looking about. The messenger had gone away.

"I pass Ballymacshane," he said, not wanting to

appear angry. "I'll send that for you . . . I'm going now—too wet to stay."

"Oh, if you would," said Acland relieved, giving him the piece of paper and sixpence. "It's very important. Can you read it?" he said, repeating the wire.

His writing was neat and plain. Graves said he could. Sandy was very tired; his head thumped, and he wanted to go home; but various carriages distributed hot and welcome tea, and he found himself led to the car from Droveen—a pathetic little figure perched on a stone close by representing Evie, who had refused all other invitations, and was not asked when she wanted to be. Mrs. Ievers had really kept her word, and the breath of suspicion had passed by, but she would do no more. The stout lady was very excited as Neill brought Sandy up.

"Only fancy," she said, "the diamond—Nita took it herself—pledged it. . . . It was traced, and she's quite amused—says we made an absurd fuss—and she won't give back the money.

Fuss! Sandy looked down the hill at the forlorn figure in grey—the fuss had closely approached a tragedy. Neill had left them, seeking for fresh victims; so he took the situation by the hand and spoke his mind plainly—the stout lady listening with surprising meekness—so far as her limited generosity allowed her she was sorry.

"I regret it," she said. "I really regret my suspicions, Mr. Acland—but after all, it is over now."

Sandy looked down the hill. He saw Evie's golf-capped head turn, watching Neill . . . something pathetic in the droop of the small figure touched

him, sweeping away the last grains of caution. His mind let itself go. Whatever happened these two should be happy. He commenced to talk rapidly, earnestly, with a certain shyness, setting out his plan. If Mrs. Ievers gave her consent to the marriage, he, Sandy Acland, being a very rich man, would endow Miss Hartland with £30,000, invested at fair interest in safe security. It would make her, in a small way, an heiress.

Mrs. Ievers alternately flushed and paled—overcome by surprise she subsided helplessly upon the tea-basket which crunched beneath her weight with a crackling despair. When rescued from a ruin of cakes and cups she called Sandy an idiot, and as she again showed signs of collapse, he led her to a stone.

Here, supported by the boulder's chilly solidity, she began to consider the question, interlarding her thoughts with ejaculations, in which the word fool was almost gruesomely monotonous.

But she thought—Evie would not be poor. A bird in the hand, better worth holding than Nita Crophorne and others, in uncertain bushes. She stammered, asking with quick petulance why, as he cared so much, he did not marry the girl himself, and then, seeing him flush, was woman enough to be sorry.

But on sifting it out she had no real objections: she was swept from her feet. Neill was coming slowly up the hill.

She rose majestically. "You are, without exception," she said, "the most foolish man I have ever met in my life; but if this is really true, I will give my consent."

Sandy drew a deep breath of sheer content.

"Then begin," he said, quietly nodding towards Evie.

"Neill." Mrs. Ievers pointed almost tragically down the hill. "Fetch Evie here; I think we'll go home. But I think you a fool," she said to Sandy, with tragic emphasis.

The little figure rose, the sweet, grey eyes had lost their sadness as the girl came up the slope. We can all live for a moment, in the happy present, when with someone we love. Sandy saw her face and was rewarded. Humanity, after all, was more than red gold. Evie's future was assured.

"Your health, Sandy, my boy," said Standish that night over a beaded bumper of champagne. "Yours and Holy Robin's and Crimson Rambler's, for I've won £20. You're a better man than ever we took you for, and if you couldn't win it by staying on, you did by falling off, and what more would you do."

CHAPTER XXI

OF RUIN AND ITS EFFECT

"Gold was good, we hoped to hold it,
And to-day we know the fulness of our gain."
—KIPLING.

SIR EDMUND GRAVES, clammily wet beneath a dry tweed crust, sped homewards towards Ballymacshane. He was about as angry as it is possible for an ill-tempered man to be without breaking down and showing the world his fury—Sandy Acland, whom he had taken for a fool, had outwitted and defeated him. The £250 which he now owed weighed little in comparison to this. He could not ride; but he was shrewd in his way, this little Englishman—and what charm induced pretty Evie Hartland to trot by his side, smile at him, and reserve cold looks for so eminently fascinating a person as Edmund Graves. He put Neill levers on one side as mere boy and girl folly. It would never be allowed, or come to anything. He swept onwards in a cold fury of impotent passion. The God of animals ordained that he drove machinery; a snorting implacable demon, and not some willing, great-hearted horse to wince from cruel lash and bit. It always helps rage to hurt something. The animal instinct to snarl and bite and claw may not be permitted; so man revenges his spleen on some docile tamed horse, or

faithful dog. Graves dashed the big car at the hills, hurled round corners and braked suddenly and roughly, until the Panhard throbbed resentfully as a thing alive.

They clambered up the steep hillside at Ballymacshane and waited on the level outside the post office. He swung in sharply; Miss Punch, apple-cheeked and buxom, oily black curls tight on her forehead, and a silly simper on her fat lips, moved from behind a pile of cheap bacon to the railing making the post office, and smiled at him. Graves pushed in the wire; he had thrust it into an inner pocket and it was smudged and crumbled.

"An' have ye both the matches won, Sir Edmund?" said Miss Punch coquetishly. "I suppose he scarcely saw ye finish."

Fresh fuel on active fury — Graves fidgeted, snarling. The whole countryside would discuss him; mock him as a man outridden and outwitted. The finish at a walk; the hack canter victory of Crimson Rambler, would keep the hunting-field laughing for a month.

"Another of the English gentleman's," said Miss Punch, sucking her pencil, frowning at the big words. "'Tis a queer farm he must have with all his geese and his doin's. I can't make out the fusht word," she said, passing it back, then observing Sir Edmund's muddy under-strata, screamed aloud: "Did ye fall? Sure, ye're drowned. Don't say he beshted ye," piped Miss Punch.

Sir Edmund grunted angrily, making no reply. The writing was very blurred. The first word might be either "hit" or give."

Graves raised his head—he remembered the cypher. Hit was sell; give, buy—knew the word to be hit,

for Sandy had said so, but, he owed the little Cockney one; supposing he paid the debt by allowing the wrong word to flash to London. Give him a little bother, and gull his parsimonious soul by some slight loss. His lips tightened, and he delayed.

"Don't say he beshted ye," said Miss Punch, "an' he, they say, like a bird perched above on a horse."

"It's—give—or hit," said Graves undecisively.

Miss Punch retrieved the paper.

"Then 'tis give, of course," she said. "That's plain—Give rapid all chickens corn. How could it be hit. It must be a quare sort of a woman he keeps, that wouldn't give the craythers a bit without a tellygram."

She retreated to an inner room, to flash the message to distant England, and Graves went out. He smiled a little. Acland would fuss and fidget—forget the joy of winning his race in some trumpery loss. Graves believed that the little man could never bring himself to large speculations. A man who weighed letters could not risk more than tenners. He set the car going; swooping onwards swiftly, and smiled as he went. He would have his way with Evie, insist on an answer, arrange so that hitherto obliging people would cease to be so, and hamper Nora until matters closed in at Castleknock. Time must help him, and he would whip the grey-beard to greater speed—so he ran homewards, and knew nothing of a white-faced weary man who drank smoked tea, and twisted destiny in his slight fingers—painting a future with brushes of gay colours, his own grey and hopeless.

A heart which beat in dull thumps, blue lips and a drawn face, were Sandy's portion next morning. Excitement and over-fatigue had been too much for him. He lay awake all night, magnifying danger,

fearing loss—certain that Jones would sell badly ; railing his own weakness in ever having been drawn into the affair.

Standish was off to some farm. Sandy crawled out to his favourite walk in the garden, accompanied as usual by cats and dogs. The blue Persian marching in front, banner tail uplifted, pretending to everyone that the walk was his idea, and he followed no man. Catty, liquid-eyed, silken-fringed, rollicking from side to side ; two kittens and a white terrier coming in dubious friendship. A high wind soared outside, but he took shelter in the empty greenhouse, the sun shone out when the black clouds let it be. He strolled up and down, and then sat in the warmth under the glass, his head bent, thinking.

For years he had slipped from day to day, from hour to hour, monotonously and regularly as a clock records time ; now in a few short months, incident upon incident had crowded upon him. Life's gods and terrors—illness—death—cure—love—loss—a sudden broadening of ideas—a glimpse into deeper things ; a taste by proxy of youth's sorrow and perfect joy ; disappointment to himself, heartache, old strands parted, old customs dead.

In a month, he would go back again, return to his neat rooms, his daily work ; a lonely man walking down the slope of age, and these bright-faced, improvident Irish people, who had changed the world for him, would be a memory.

If he could stay here—never go back—live improvidently as they did, happy from day to day ; human kittens and puppies rejoicing in sufficient food, sunshine, and play ; with no cankering anxiety of ever gathering an income ; no difficulties as to investments, for there would be nothing to invest,

Live so, with someone with him, a companion to the end.

The shares were in the house, transferred to Evie; only awaiting her signature—he had done that before he spoke—£30,000—his no longer, and he wondered if he was a little mad.

"Sandy, Aunt Catty said you were not well. Edmund motored me over. He came to see Evie, but she is at Droveen—they took her back there last night. Edmund is cross as sticks."

It was Nora, pretty and warm, even on this bitter day—her perfect health defying pinching winds, her hands deep in the pockets of a shabby ulster.

"Telegram, sir," said Phillips, following her.

Sandy took it, glancing at the contents. Translated, it said: "Shares falling 27—serious—do you understand that?" Apparently the estimable Mr. Jones was a little stupid. They would not lose, but he had done well in selling. Sandy mentally patted himself upon the back. He was cleverer away than they were on the spot.

"Act on my wire. I foresaw this fall," he wrote in cypher, and gave it to Phillips.

"You do look ill, Sandy," said Nora. "Surely you ought not to worry over stupid business."

"I'd have the world worrying my financial bones if I didn't," he said. "Yes; I feel ill." He met her eyes, his own a little piteous. "You see the cures may have failed; it will perhaps be a permanent rest at Woking after all."

It was a poor little joke, poorly attempted.

"The cure ought not to include steeplechases and attention to business," she said gravely, "or I am no doctor." Perching on one of the stages, now crumbling with dry rot, she looked at him, swinging

slender, ill-shod feet. His depression died; he grew cheerful with that sense of restful companionship which her presence brought. Evie had been a vision, a mist-wraith wrought by his own denseness, but this bright woman was reality, and he watched her wistfully.

"Abandon Woking," she said softly. "Make a certainty of disturbing long-buried bones in the churchyard in the village. Stay here for ever."

The sun shone, warming them. It was his own idea; he sat down, considering it. No more London and routine, no mind-wearing anxiety, but this quiet, green country from year to year. Golden, gentle summers, full of nothing—trips to the scenes of his toils, then a far-off city of delights; mild, horse-filled autumns; genial, merry winters, with Blackbirds, Holy Robins, and their successors; and so until the end, and he slept among the crowded dead on the wind-swept hillside, instead of in an expensive plot in the grimly-beautiful garden at Woking. It tempted and appealed. He had money enough—no need to work. But one thing was lacking; his blue eyes studied Nora's bright face; then he sighed. No woman would care to marry him, a foolish little business man—a tailor on horseback—a thing to be mocked at for silly speeches and mean ways.

"Couldn't you manage it, Sandy?" Nora's voice cooed like a wood-pigeon in May. "It takes so little to live here. You can't be so very poor; we—might make you happy, Sandy."

Then, as they sat silent, there burst upon them a feminine cyclone; tearing along the path, rushing into the greenhouse, almost sweeping Sandy from his feet.

"Oh, Sandy— You dear—you dear! Oh, how

could you? I can't take it, and yet I—oh, I can't say no. Yesterday I saw no hope—to-day I'm not on earth but in heaven. Are you really so rich, Sandy? I stayed at Droveen last night. Mrs. Ievers told me what you'd done. Yes; Neill's here too. Here he is—"

The girl was almost hysterical; she ran to Nora, clinging to her, talking incoherently. Mrs. Ievers had told her of Sandy's gift; had accepted her with lame graciousness; and Evie forgot every slight and snub. She was rich as they counted riches. They could take a house and live happily—with hunters and trappers—no pinch of poverty.

She danced about him, until he tasted for the second time the almost perfect joy of giving.

What would this radiant rainbow of girlhood ever have been to him? He who had dreamt she cared, and wanted him to come forward. Her fit mate, boyishly happy, awkwardly grateful, was by her side. They would find life together, dive to his depths, float on its sparkling shallows, always side by side. He was so glad that no one knew his folly, that he with his set bachelor ways, his ailments and tonics, and milks and sodas, had imagined she could marry him.

The two flitted away for a minute into the cold outside. Nora, still on the stage, but very quiet now, looked at him gravely.

"What is this, Sandy? . . . Thirty thousand pounds . . . ! a mad freak of philanthropy which we cannot allow, or a gift which you can afford."

"Can easily afford," he replied quietly.

"You cheated me then," she said, astonished and evidently ill-pleased: "I—I—thought you were poor."

"A poor heart, Miss Nora," he said, with gentle

depression; "a rich man. You feared Graves with his little income! I could buy and sell him and not miss the money; but poor"—he dissected himself mercilessly—"because I am habitually mean, habitually a miser."

"Mean—miserly—for shame, Sandy! Look at those two and repeat it."

"Money I don't miss—shares from which the interest merely accumulates. That is my generosity—and it was a wrench even then. Don't laud me for unpossessed gifts. Oh, another wire, Phillips!—business hails me on this morning."

He tore it up, believing it wanted no answer. It said the shares still fell—24 now—and was from Jones. He did not want these minute details, but rather an assurance that he had got clear.

"And as for taking it"—he nodded towards the two among the bare apple trees—"they must take it."

They seemed ready to—the dining-room rang with their silly jokes. They waited on Sandy themselves. Milk and soda? Evie mixed it and shot Phillips in the eye with the soda-water, necessitating his pained retreat. "Gor lummne!" he said outside the door, as he summoned Ellie.

"Salad?" Neill helped it and dropped the dressing on Sandy's sleeve. But who could blame them? Not Acland. He said, "Very careless of you," to his faithful servitor on his return, and allowed Miss Catty to rub in the grease with her pocket-handkerchief.

The two brought sunshine to the now gloomy day, spread it over hot chops and cold beef, until Miss Catty, who was sentimental, wiped her eyes with the oil-and-vinegar-soaked pocket-handkerchief, and

finding it unpleasant, immediately quarrelled with Miss Susie.

Standish and Graves were late, having walked some distance to see a young horse.

The lovers went out after luncheon, absolutely happy, oblivious of damp greyness, the whip of a snow-laden wind; to them it was soft June and gay sunshine—our hearts make weather as our companions make our world.

"It makes one feel young to see those two."

Acland stood in the littered hall, all the wrappings of the Christmas presents piled high in a dusty heap.

"The elixir of youth." Nora smiled, but her eyes were sad. "The Alchemists of old mocked the world, and while fools paid gold for flagons of harmless tinted waters—they meant love. It knows no limit of age. One sees white-haired people smile at each other as sweetly as boy and girl and fret if Darby is late for tea, or Joan misses five minutes of the morning walk. Don't you feel like a fairy god-mother, fraudulent man?"

Fraudulent! He shivered.

"Does the word remind you of your business?" she said mischievously.

"Rather of the world," he answered, noting his last wire in his pocket-book.

"Telegram, sir," said Phillips, coming in. "In fact, three, sir. Miss Punch had no one to send before."

He opened them anxiously. They repeated the same note—Jones did not understand—the shares were falling, falling—24; 22½; 18; 16¼. A sudden flash of anxiety touched Acland. Could there have been a mistake? Could?—he grew pale and catching up a cap, ran to the door. He must see Miss

Punch immediately. Graves' motor stood at the door. He eyed it with desire, wishing he could drive; but he ran on. The high wind met him, buffeting his tired little body and sweeping his breath away with clutching, icy fingers—the road to the village seemed endless.

Then a motor coughed behind him; he saw Phillips in the Panhard, driving with great ease—Nora smiling in the back seat, a coat in her hands.

"Phillips said he could drive, so we came on. Put this on, Sandy."

The car licked up the remaining half-mile with a fiery tongue, and checked, throbbing, before Miss Punch's house. She was ensconced as a grocer selling tea, but left a patient customer, and came smirking to Sandy's imperious call. The wire Sir Edmund sent! Oh, she had a note made, but she recalled it because they argued over the first word.

"Give—it was—which was the only sinse—give rapid— Holy heaven! was it wrong?"

The stuffy shop, with its combined smell of bacon and tea and candles, spun round, rocking ominously. Acland held by the railing, his face white. He had wired to Jones to *buy* up all this mine as the thing commenced to fall—had confirmed the order to-day. No wonder Jones sent records of the hourly slump. He wondered dimly that so determined a buying had not checked the fall; it was apparently too rotten. London's financial day was over; by Monday morning he would be a ruined man. Holders would have jumped to sell. Possibly, nay, probably, by now he controlled every available share in the great swindle.

He could think, though the shop rocked.

"A wakeness he has, like me Aunt Mary Anne's

cousin took in chapel. Wather, Miss Punch, me dear, an' whisky, the crayther."

The women buzzed about him, proffering kindly help. A thick tumbler full of tepid water chinked against his teeth. But he pulled himself together, telling them he was all right. Every farthing he possessed would go in this loss. A millionaire here ; a small man in big speculations such as this. He wired to Jones, writing with numbed fingers, knowing too well what the answer would be. No dream of Utopian rest now, but a start again from the bottom, with neither health or energy. Jones would probably have gone home to that villa in Surbiton, where he lived the blameless, lifeless life of a city clerk. He would receive no answer—that evening.

"I'm afeared"—Miss Punch's simper had given way ; she forgot herself for the moment—"ye didn't mane to feed the craythers after all, sir. I asked Sir Edmund, and he said 'twas one or th' other."

"No ; I didn't mean to feed them," said Acland with dry lips, "and—Sir Edmund knew it."

He went out then. Nora sprang up with a quick exclamation. His face was mottled, blue and yellow white, his breath uneven.

"Is it much too late to get to England to-day?" he said dully.

"Impossible," she said. "You can drive in to-morrow—catch a midday, slow train. Oh! what's wrong, Sandy."

"Bad news," he answered, getting in : "To-morrow will do as well. I could do nothing until Monday. No use to spend Sunday there hearing the worst."

He bore himself pluckily, trying to talk, but his heart hammered in his ears ; his hands were clammy.

The world they rushed through receded dimly, and leaden weights were laid about his feet.

Ruin ! The speculation had been gigantic. There was no getting away from it, no creeping round sheltered corners. It would absorb his life's savings. The thing was a pricked bubble, a panic. He knew from a letter that morning. He had bought at yesterday's high prices ; he must sell out. Sell ! What fool would buy ?

The car swung in at the gate, and halted before its irate owner, now waiting upon the doorstep, his thin face purple.

"Knew exactly how to drive, Sir Edmund," apologised Phillips. "Mr. Acland exceedingly hurried and indisposed."

"Oh !" Sir Edmund forgot the car. "Ah ! any mistake—Acland ?"

"One of yours." Sandy looked at him, saw him flinch. Graves' face changed guiltily, and the little man knew. "One of yours," he repeated. "I read the wire which you took for me yesterday over to you. It was important. A mistake which may ruin me," he finished.

"Ruin !" Graves shrugged his shoulders, turning to Nora. "He's lost a tenner, no doubt. He is the meanest-spirited—"

But Nora was gone.

Mrs. Ievers, portly and befurred, was in the drawing-room ; she crossed to meet Sandy, speaking quickly.

"I've done as you said," she whispered. She was the type of woman who whispers. "But are you sure there's no mistake ? Neill must marry money."

Acland stared at her. £30,000—a fortune to him now, and out of reach of claimants. He had £5,000

settled on him by his father, now probably his whole fortune. They could not blame him if he changed his mind, or, at least, halved the sum. He hesitated, but a door clanged; merry voices sounded in the hall. Then he looked up steadily; whatever happened, he would cheat the grasp-all misery of two young lives.

"I assure you," he said, "that Miss Evie is the owner of £30,000. Fortunately I transferred it to her some days ago. She is independent—Neill the luckiest of men."

Graves hearing, spoke sharply.

"What's that?" he asked. "Where is Evie?"

Edmund Graves had done one or two mean things, and the God of just dealings raised his hand and struck. Mrs. Ievers, ignoring the months which were past—the open secret of Graves' own suit, rustled across and spoke. "Thirty thousand, just as a gift. Eccentric. Fabulously rich, quite a fairy tale," she pattered quickly, rather thinking she had done it herself.

Graves listened, lines deepening in his narrow face. "Rich. This little, mean Cockney, who counted pence and wrote on post-cards and saved in every minor way. They had been enemies from the commencement, had measured swords, with odds of a hundred to one on the taller man; and yet the other, clumsy, no fighter, almost ridiculous, had scored each point and thrust, claimed the applause and bowed a victor. And though Graves did not guess it then, a stricken victor, bleeding from a cruel wound and triumphing over a greater opponent—self. He was glad he had sent the wrong wire now. Evie would have been assuredly his, if this fool had not meddled.

"Very charming, quite a romance; unable to gain himself, he endows a younger man. You're sure," Sir Edmund thrust once more, though knowing it to be a mean stroke and hopeless, "that he was clear when he settled it—quite—sober."

The word reached Acland as a whip might, rousing him. He walked across, a better actor than he had believed himself to be, some papers in his hand—his feet leaden—chill hands drawing him downwards.

"Keep these, Standish," he said. "You're trustee, you see; yes, Mrs. Ievers, whatever happens, Evie has her fortune and her future. A very little thing to me now—for—"

The groping hands caught him, the people round him receded, growing dim, all the mighty waters of the world roared in his ears, and he sank down, down to nothingness.

"Telegraph for his own man, he's very bad. A mental shock," said little Dr. Magee, looking gravely at the unconscious man.

CHAPTER XXII

OF THE END OF THE CURE

"Our life is rounded with a sleep."

—*The Tempest.*

RUSTLE of quiet watchers round a still form, soft sunshine filtering through lowered blinds.

"Phillips—where am I?—lift me."

"Certainly, sir." And Phillips was scarcely aware that as he said it he sobbed.

For two days Acland had lain unconscious, raving, sometimes babbling of his loss, then of Evie, of Sir Edmund's mistake, and back again to Jones and the mine and the futility of hope. Hovering with failing heart very close to the border over which there is no recrossing.

He woke to see things dimly; a sensation of people growing gradually into a picture—of Standish appearing from nowhere, to growl, "Cheer up, Sandy!" in gloomy tones, and appearing to suffer from cold, for he blew his nose—of someone half-seen slipping out, and of the sunshine striking a quivering bar of dust across the blazing fire.

He woke gradually, wondering where he was, how he had left the hall and come up here? Then by degrees—blest mortal who has not felt it—blurred senses clearing, of the knowledge of active trouble, the sudden, dull weight of the misfortune mercy had

allowed us to forget crushing us roughly with cruel grip.

"How long have I been here?" He stared at the sunlight. "It must be Sunday morning. Phillips—my things—I must catch the mail—I must get over to see to things," his voice trailed weakly.

Grattan's figure grew into the picture suddenly.

"Never saw such a chap to overdo things, Alex," he said easily. "First you rested with the rabbits and the sheep, next you fit in steeplechases, love-affairs, and all kinds of unhealthy things. Eat this, and don't worry."

He thrust a spoonful of jelly between unwilling lips.

From somewhere, seemingly a long way off, Miss Susie spoke.

"The Brahma hen, but you're welcome to her, Sandy, she was four years old."

"I must get up, write, wire; I must be in London by Monday."

This was Tuesday.

"I tell you, you mustn't worry; you must sleep."

Grattan bent over the restless man, and gave him something to drink. It was dark and bitter; but after a few minutes the picture blurred again, peace crept up softly, wrapping tortured senses in her grey folds. Acland slept quietly.

"It's been touch and go," said Grattan; "but I think he'll do now. He has overdone it, and there has been a great shock. The Deep Rand mine has absolutely smashed, and from his mutterings he appears to be concerned in it. It wasn't like Alex, for he is very shrewd. If he doesn't collapse now, we'll pull him through. Of course, if he insists on going back to London, I'll wash my hands of it. He'll be dead in six months."

Peace dwelt with the troubled man for some hours; he woke too weak to think, ate more concentrated Brahma, and slept again until next morning.

"Touch and go, Alex my friend," said Grattan, coming to see him. Phillips had slept on the wide rep-covered sofa. "You try yourself a bit highly; if your general health had not greatly improved, you'd be gone now. Yes, you may get up and look into your affairs if you like. It will probably worry you less than thinking of them. I am fascinated with this home of yours, and sorry I must leave to-day. Don't thank me, old chap; every life gained is a throw to death for me in our never-ending wrestle."

Acland got up, swaying on unsteady feet, gaining strength as he dressed. Then fortified by eggs and milk, he crept out to the garden, ensconced by Phillips in the greenhouse, with rugs and cushions and a table for his letters.

It was Wednesday morning. Hope lay dead behind him. His papers told him of the gigantic bubble, its bursting, and the day's panic; of men rushing to sell, but no word, curiously, of his mad buying. It was another fraud, worked to make someone's fortune, more carefully planned and elaborate than usual, thus further reaching. He read bitterly, laying his neat books on the table, writing careful calculations. . . . He was a ruined man.

Phillips came with hot broth and slips of toast. His expression was uneasy, because he purposed telling his master that he contemplated matrimony, that his hitherto catholic taste had crystallised into one love. Hope led him to think that Acland might

remain in Ireland, retaining him, with Ellie disposed somewhere—and if not, Ellie's grey eyes were upon a public-house in Tulloun, and Phillips thought he might hire out horses.

"Thank you." Acland looked at the broth. "Which now, Phillips?" he asked, smiling faintly.

"Speckled cock chicken, sir; breeding uncertain, therefore no particular sorrow, sir."

Phillips laid down the broth and cleared his throat.

"Phillips"—Acland docketed and dated telegrams carefully with languid fingers—"you—you must look out for another place."

"Sir! Have I offended you?" said Phillips, in astonishment.

"I shan't require a man now," and Acland, after a pause, explained his ruin. "I must start again in some small way, but I'll see you get a good place, Phillips—and there must be no word of this here—no one must know."

Phillips proffered sympathy—then shyly he confided his hopes concerning Ellie, and hers concerning the public-house, and both as to matrimony.

"Indefinitely postponed now, sir," he finished quietly.

"Postponed. Why, it will suit very well," said Acland.

Phillips stood stiffly.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but I don't wish to leave. I venture to suggest you would do badly without help, sir—I—I—can stay extremely cheaply—save it in folding your clothes, sir—but—I couldn't leave you now, sir."

The sun shone outside, so it could not have been rain on the glass which blurred Acland's sight. The

god money, worshipped by him for nearly thirty years—even his valet, a merely suave, perfectly trained machine, could despise it.

"Phillips—I—can't— Oh, go to the devil, Phillips," grated Acland huskily.

"Certainly, sir. Decline to leave *you*, sir," said Phillips, and fled.

A faint wind stirred outside, rustling the branches; the earth was bare and brown, but in the sheltered warmth green noses peered up, bulbs, telling the earth waked to her spring . . . the hills towered above the high walls bleak and black, frowning down on him. He left the telegrams; sitting with loosely clasped hands looking out. Smutty streets and close rooms would soon be his portion.

Nora Hartland came out to him, she had met Phillips returning in much grief and had been implored by him to go to the master.

"Oh, Sandy," she said, "what a fright you gave us all—and what are you worrying over there?"

"Can you keep a secret?" he said—and told her.

"But," she said quickly, "even if it is so bad, there is the £30,000 you gave to Evie—she can't take it now."

Sandy supped his chicken-broth. Yes, this money was riches enough in itself to start on—but—he thought of sudden ruin which would be worse than his own.

"Nora," he said, "will you give me your promise. Evie must not know. I may have some money—not be so deeply hit—in any case, I shall leave here this week—still as a millionaire. Promise me."

She stood looking intently at him. The others

called him mean, had laughed at his foolish, saving ways—would call him mean still and never know.

"I—promise—" she said at last. "For I believe you would rather I did so."

"And don't look tragic—" he smiled at her. "I have brains—friends—I shall work up again—I was thinking of staying here altogether, but it was not to be."

"Keep him," Grattan had said. "Work to him will mean breakdown and death. Get him out of business. He's drawn a thread too tightly."

"Stay here; Sandy. So little suffices here," she said softly.

"I meant to take a house. I even thought that perhaps—as I was rich—someone—might keep me company"—his eyes meeting hers were wistful as the setters at his feet.

"Like you for your money—no, for yourself, Sandy—for yourself."

"Oh, you—they couldn't," he said.

She came close to him, pleading.

"See! my godmother has left me a little legacy—come to Castleknock. It's me—I know it's me. For a time I thought it was Evie, but lately I've known it wasn't. We could be true companions, Sandy. So little will do."

There came suddenly to a lonely heart—peace. He knew he could let the world go, for someone cared for him. He had thought his money might make him acceptable, and here was bright-faced Nora pleading to a pauper.

"Oh—I am too content to stay—" he said, and took her hands in his. "They'll laugh at you," he added. "I'm only a middle-aged, miserly duffer."

They saw as much happiness as Neill and Evie as

they looked out across the bare garden. Hope perched on bare apple boughs—alighted beside them on rotting greenhouse stages.

He went on with his telegrams then, saying he wanted to get it over, laughing at the miser he must pose as in futurity to keep Evie in the dark.

One lay beneath the pile, running in cypher as the other: "Couldn't act on your orders in face of panic—writing—" the date was Saturday, despatched at 12.30.

Writing—with a gasp Acland turned to his letters, searching for one addressed by his clerk. It was there. Mr. Jones grumbled and regretted, but was firm. He really couldn't do it. In fact, before receiving the second wire he had sold. He awaited dismissal patiently, but reminded his employer that it would have "been sheer madness."

Acland was weak, the world began to flare and rock again; the remains of the chicken-broth flung in his face by Phillips, who had come for the tray, revived him.

"I"—Phillips doubled for the doctor—"I, Nora? You were willing to take a poor man with two hundred a year."

"Riches—paid quarterly," she said stoutly.

"I'm a fraud. I've lost nothing—Jones never acted on my instructions. I'm exceedingly rich after all." He gave her the letter, and stood up, holding by her, for his brain reeled.

The arrival of Phillips and Grattan with brandy, of Aunt Catty with salts, and Aunt Susie with feathers and matches, brought them back to everyday life. Sandy was treated to a little of everything, put back in his chair. But happiness is a skilled doctor: the flutter at his heart died away, and after a few minutes,

he unfolded the story of his supposed ruin and its inaccuracy, and was perhaps the happiest little man in the world.

Then, this time shyly, with age dropping away and youth springing up in a new well of joy, he told them the rest of the tale, Nora, hanging her pretty head, standing beside. The wave of congratulation was trying, since it included many kisses. Then with much tact Aunt Catty swept the party away, and he and Nora were left alone.

Wistfully happy, looking out across the dark world—grudging the lost years a little, wishing them back again—humanity always wants a little more than it gets. Nora also thought she would regret the bailiffs.

"Phillips." Sandy spoke to his man before lunch. "I find I shall not have to part with you—you know the circumstances—but if you wish, Phillips, you shall have that house you spoke of for a wedding present, and Holy Robin to start your stud."

"I should prefer to remain with you, sir," said Phillips firmly. "Plenty of houses at Castleknock, sir. And—" Phillips coughed—"should be proud to exercise Robin—at all near meets, sir."

"Very well, Phillips." Sandy spoke quietly. "And—send these wires—one unfortunately is sixpence-halfpenny. Here's the money."

"Certainly, sir. Thank you, sir." Phillips spoke woodenly, but his face was very human . . . his eyes shone.

Sandy Acland, his strayings over: a rest-cure lying permanently in front of him, went down to luncheon.

THE END

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